

## MENTAL HEALTH

It seems that education in mental health is beginning to become a reality. The tendency to ostracize the mentally ill is diminishing and the detection of the first signs of derangement, indicating a need for attention, is increasing more and more. Today it is possible to carry out primary prevention, up to a certain point and secondary prevention on a far wider scale. Psychiatrists often show a negative attitude towards such cases, as if disorders from known causes or illness which could be prevented are no concern of theirs. Their view is that it is for other doctors to deal with such disorders and that the rôle of the psychiatrist is to explore the unknown.

Concrete results have been obtained in the treatment of the mentally ill. In Great Britain only 13.5% of admissions have been compulsory, the remainder being voluntary. A larger number of patients has left psychiatrist hospitals after improvement in condition, much earlier than was previously the case. The readaptation of the chronically mentally ill is being effected with success, and the number of beds occupied in hospitals is beginning to decrease.

The community and commercial undertakings are now more willing to accept the mentally ill whose condition has improved. Greater tolerance towards the permanently handicapped is also being shown.

The discovery of new techniques enable a better use of available resources to be made in accomplishing customary tasks. A shortage of personnel has obliged the organization of medical and social services to change its outlook by eliminating wastage through double employment and by encouraging co-operation. Definitely successful results in therapeutic treatment have led to an increased number of earlier cures. The attenuation of distress symptoms, made possible by chemico-therapy and progress in the treatment of ambulatory cases, give the mentally ill further reasons for hope.

The purpose of World Mental Health Year was to give fresh impetus to research in mental processes and in particular in the sphere of human relations.

56 countries drew up national programmes of action which resulted in conferences, the issue of publications and public gatherings. More than 400 researches of a technical or scientific character were made.

Under the auspices of the World Federation of Mental Health, research was made into six subjects: child-care, epidemiologic enquiries into the field of mental health, mental health and industry, psychological problems of migration, mental health and old age.

The VIth International Congress of mental health was particularly active during that year.<sup>1</sup>

During the course of the past few years the number of mentally ill seems to have increased considerably.

In France, for example, the proportion of psychiatric hospital cases has risen from 0.3% in 1835 to 2.9% on the eve of the Second World War. After a period of regression between 1939-1944, it has steadily risen and has now reached a figure of 3%.

This means that more than 110,000 people are at present enclosed. Nearly one third of hospital beds are occupied by the mentally ill. Neurotics, minor mental cases and psychosomatic cases are not included in these statistics.

Whilst this increase is related to the conditions of modern life, account should also be taken of a greater vigilance on the part of specialists and also that they are better informed about the subject.

It is urgently necessary to reply to an increasing number of requests and to put pressure on the public authorities to face this affliction. It is also equally important, however, to detect the multiple causes of mental disorder, to keep the public informed and to deflect the fight against mental illness in the direction of increased measures of prevention, by associating the greatest possible number of persons actively engaged in public life in this task.

What then is this new branch of medicine called "Mental Health" which was able to collect together in Paris on September 5, 1961, more than 1,500 specialists from 52 different countries?

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<sup>1</sup>The *Informations sociales*, Paris, December 1961, devoted a special number to this congress which took place in Paris from August 30 to September 5, 1961.

## MISCELLANEOUS

It in fact corresponds to all the processes, methods and techniques enabling the human personality to flourish in a world in rapid evolution, and giving man the chance of being harmoniously balanced in his own social surroundings.

This branch of medicine started fifty years ago, first of all because of a desire to humanize conditions of caring for the mentally ill. One of its first pioneers at the beginning of this century was Clifford Beers, himself a former mental patient.

Since then, progress in scientific matters has enlarged the ambitions of those who believe that it is time to buttress, and often to revise, the traditional precepts of human wisdom thanks to scientific facts in matters of psychology, sociology, biology and to other branches, such as education, social services, ethnology, etc.

At a time when the physical sciences enable men to perform spectacular feats, it would be inconceivable for the human sciences, in spite of their relative backwardness, not to be applied to guiding men in their mutual relationships and in adapting them to a world ever more complex, artificial and changing which they themselves have forged.

That is the reason that the International Congress of Mental Health in Paris collected together not only psychiatrists, but also representatives of the branches mentioned above. It has been a question of evaluating the work which was undertaken during World Mental Health Year, modest counterpart of the International Physical Year.

The subjects which have been studied are those which present themselves daily to all social workers in the form of problems which have to be resolved or of advice which has to be given.