

The psychology of the hospitalised patient, Actualités sociales, Paris, 1962, No. 10.

During a refresher course organised in November 1961 for inspectors of public hospitalisation establishments by the Ministry of Public Health and Population, two talks were given by Dr. Koupernik and Professor Péquignot on the psychology of the hospitalised patient. They studied in complementary perspectives the psychology of the adult and that of the aged adult.

Dr. Koupernik analysed the relationship of the patient to his illness before considering that which links him with the family and society. Illness which strikes man constitutes a menace. Illusory or justified, it can be localised in an area which the patient considers vital—heart, head, respiratory system, kidneys—or result from a generalised and malignant process which poisons the patient bit by bit (cancer, leukemia). Other reactions are observed in patients: fear of suffering, fear of paralysis, fear of loss of sexuality, fear of losing one's reason, fear of rejection by society.

Generally speaking, illness "will profoundly modify its victim's relationship with the world". It risks putting him, vis-à-vis his family, in a state of dependence which will be more or less accepted and which will create material problems. "A check must be made to this menace which illness represents", writes Dr. Koupernik, "and this check will differ from person to person, according to his constitution but also according to the nature itself of his childhood experiences." Distinguishing the reactions and attitudes of infinite variety which illness arouses, Dr. Koupernik shows that it is most often a return to childhood conditions. It is in this field that he studied the relations which bind the patient, on the one hand to those who are looking after him, the doctors and the nurses and, on the other hand, to the other patients.

The speaker then gave a picture of the psychological condition of the patient, analysed his feelings when hospitalisation was announced and followed him from the day of his arrival in his new place of abode to the day of his departure. He came to the conclusion that it was necessary to re-think the hospital's function, in particular considering that the teaching of medical psychology, by means of meetings for example, would help hospital doctors and nurses in the psychological handling of the patient.

Professor Péquignot spoke of "another adult, the old person". It is important to keep hold of the fact, he stressed right from the beginning "that old people constitute a category which is only separated from other categories in an erroneous and abusive manner". He considers that the problem of old people has been badly put, because they have been separated from others. Difficulties have thus been created which are not the ones with which one is really faced.

A GLANCE THROUGH THE REVIEWS

What aspects strike this hospitalised adult ? In the first place, dependence. "Old age", says Professor Péquignot, "means re-learning the dependent life, it is the contrary of autonomy, the fact that once again, one must obey, one must realise, that one needs help in all the acts of everyday life." Old people also undergo an immense feeling of uselessness. "They see it and it is explained to them." Professor Péquignot then attacked the accepted administrative selection which differentiates old people from other patients, and showed the falsity, on the scientific level, of the distinction made between "interesting" and "uninteresting" patients. He considers that the psychological problem which old people pose can only be resolved when the latter are treated as patients, "are nursed and are examined in the same conditions and in the same time as patients of any other age".

In the second part of his speech, the speaker defined the attitude of everybody to these patients, an attitude which, to be effective, must be stamped with respect and firmness. Geratology is the most difficult and the most delicate of all the medicines, underlined Professor Péquignot. It requires sufficient staff to give nursing of quality.
