

Introduction

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MENTAL HEALTH, WE ARE TOLD, is one of the major problems of our time. The summary of the President's Commission on Mental Health states: "The burden of mental illness in the United States...probably constitutes our primary public health issue. For the past few years, the most commonly used estimate is that at any one time, 10 percent of the population needs some form of mental health care....There is new evidence that this figure may be closer to 15 percent of the population [over 32 million people]."¹

The thrust of the new Mental Health Systems Act is to improve mental health services, especially to the chronically mentally ill, children, adolescents, the elderly, and racial and ethnic minorities; to develop an Office of Prevention in the National Institute of Mental Health; and to enact the first provisions for rights, protection and advocacy for the mentally ill. The main weaknesses of the act lie in its limited funding and lack of strong enforcement measures in the rights and advocacy section.

Inherent in the findings of the president's commission and the law is the need for adequate information. The development, management and evaluation of mental health services require it. There is need for a flow of accurate, current, complete, and continuous data. How is this information to be passed along, and what resources exist for optimum access to knowledge that is available now? One significant method of providing information is through libraries. Libraries have been called "switching mechanisms," whereby information in one form or one

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place is transmitted in other forms to other places.² It is the librarian who manages the intelligent communication between information and user. And, as Brodman points out, "the single most important criterion of excellence in a medical school library was the caliber of the library staff."³

This issue of *Library Trends* is devoted to mental health information and will examine the "switching mechanisms" in this field—the mental health libraries and the state of mental health librarianship. It will look at some of the resources that do exist in the fields of computerized data bases, the law, mental retardation, audiovisuals, and history, and will also explore the role of the mental health librarian and the patient.

There has been substantial growth in the literature of mental health. For example, *The Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry* has grown from a one-volume work of 1628 pages in 1957 to three volumes of 3365 pages in 1980. Nemiah, in his introduction to this third edition, begins: "Modern psychiatry is a great, brawling metropolis, which has engulfed in its urban sprawl a host of arts and sciences. The courageous traveler...will find the thoroughfares thronged with scholars from a multitude of disciplines and crowded with artisans displaying a bewildering array of clinical skills."⁴ Great skill is also needed to map pathways for the information seeker intelligently.

This is the first attempt to bring together in one journal issue a number of important topics in the mental health field. It was not possible to include all subjects, but a special effort was made to highlight important areas, coverage of which is not easily accessible elsewhere.

In the first paper, Mackler begins by defining what the mental health field encompasses. She traces the historical development of federal commissions and legislation leading up to the Mental Health Systems Act, and correctly notes that mental health libraries are not mentioned in any of the landmark mental health laws, and astonishingly, that no librarians were on the full-time or voluntary staff of the latest president's commission or on any of the task force panels. The types of mental health libraries in the United States and their settings are then described. This is followed by an examination of mental health librarianship: education, training, professional organizations, and new roles. The outlook in the field during a period of limited financial resources will depend on the strength of the group's members in cooperation with each other and the ingenuity and forcefulness they use in presenting their needs to overcome the threat of retrenchment.

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"On-Line Searching in Psychiatry" is a careful and complete description of data bases and the terms used and techniques needed to do computer searches in the mental health field. Reviewing the four main data bases, *Psychological Abstracts* (PsycINFO), *National Clearinghouse for Mental Health Information* (NCMHI), *Social Sciences Citation Index* (Social SciSearch), and *Index Medicus* (MEDLINE), Epstein clearly delineates for each one of the subject matter covered, timeliness, and cost, and then critiques their strengths and weaknesses. More specialized bases such as Bioethicsline and the Lithium Librarian are also described, and review articles that have evaluated the various data bases are discussed. What clearly emerges for the reader is some direction as to where to initiate a search and how to better understand the overall options available in computer searching.

In the next two chapters two psychiatrists and a psychologist share their special expertise on important topics. Weinstein addresses the problem of "Mental Health and the Law." In today's society so conscious of legal rights and remedies, the legal system is having more and more effect on mental health professionals and the mentally ill themselves. The disciplines of law, medicine and psychology are clearly defined and illustrated, and the multidisciplinary characteristics of the field explored. This is followed by a valuable historical summary of legal issues in mental health. Many difficult terms are explained, diagnostic categories of legal significance are given, and their importance is put into perspective. The author reviews the available literature—both books and journals—and mentions three specialized law libraries for further reference. This is a lucid and valuable contribution in a difficult and expanding area.

In a bibliographic essay, Strider and Menolascino trace the development in the field of mental retardation. The authors are well-known for their work and writings on this subject. This is an annotated, evaluative guide and discussion of the literature on the history of mental retardation and its causes, prevention and treatment. Also covered are the education and rights of the mentally retarded. At a time when the mentally retarded are being moved back into the community as a result of changing attitudes toward their treatment, it is important to have access to the most current and authoritative literature indicating how the community-based mentally retarded can best be managed.

In her comprehensive discussion of audiovisuals, Kenney first considers the special advantages of this media, especially videotapes, in mental health. The capability and usefulness of audiovisuals has grown enormously in the training and research of mental health professionals

and in patient treatment and education. The author examines the resources available to find material, and appends a comprehensive annotated list of media sources. She reviews methods of acquiring, evaluating, cataloging, indexing, and storing audiovisuals. The important issues of patients' rights and copyright also are considered.

Awareness of the need for historical perspective has prompted all the authors in this issue to consider the past as well as the present in their chapters. It is with this understanding of the importance of history that Mylenki describes significant libraries with historical material—books, journals, archives, manuscripts, and oral histories—in psychiatry and psychoanalysis. Within these libraries, there are special subject collections, such as witchcraft and mesmerism; letters and unpublished papers, such as correspondence between Freud and Simmel; early hospital reports; and an extensive dissertation collection. The author details the specialties and notes whether services such as photocopying and interlibrary lending are available in each library.

The last two articles explore methods of working directly with the patient. Russell approaches patient education for the mentally ill from the rehabilitation model: preparing the patient to go back into the community. There is an important distinction to be made between patient information, which involves directing someone to material without interpretation or counseling, and patient education, which implies an active effort to change the behavior of an individual. In both cases the material should be authoritative, honest and balanced. It must also be appropriate for the audience for whom it is intended so that it can be understood properly by the patient. The patient education program which Russell describes is administered under the Rehabilitation Services Department of McLean Hospital in Boston. The author discusses some of the most useful material in this collection, relates personal experiences with the patients, and includes commentaries from the staff, including the hospital director, about the program. These latter are particularly interesting, because an encouraging attitude is evident but points of controversy also are honestly conveyed.

Elser's personal reminiscences of her bibliotherapy program in a state hospital concludes the issue. State hospitals have been an important part of the mental health movement in this country. This article provides a look at a bibliotherapist who started working in the field before the policy of deinstitutionalization went into effect and continued during the transitional period. There is a live and warm quality to the author's description of work with groups of troubled adolescents and fearful elderly patients. We feel the personal qualities of interest and

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honesty that are necessary in order to be a successful bibliotherapist. The settings, as Elser points out, may be changing, but the needs and potential of using literature in a therapeutic way with the patient remain, and can easily be transferred to new settings such as nursing homes and public libraries.

As issue editor, I would like to express my thanks to the contributors, whose informative articles collectively provide a comprehensive overview of relevant and important mental health information.

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