

Psychediatric counselling, a form of healthcare once remote from the public, has achieved broader acceptance in the last ten years and is entering the nineties with new tools for extending tranquility and wellbeing. Important new drugs that biotechnology has brought to market, new therapeutic techniques pioneered by local researchers and sharper diagnostic skills by healthcare professionals have put psychotherapy at the threshold of a new era.

"We're better at recognizing illnesses today and patients have become more comfortable at presenting themselves for examination," commented Dr. Charles Kaegi, a member of the Department of Psychiatry at Ravenswood Hospital Medical Center. "I also think psychiatrists have become better able to distinguish between diagnoses that in the past were not clearly distinct.

"But probably the major reason why more patients are coming for treatment is because other physicians are better trained at recognizing psychological problems. Internists and family practitioners in particular are better trained now to recognize emotional troubles. It's become part of their curriculum in medical school," Kaegi said.

Anil Godbole, M.D., Chairman of the Psychiatry Department at Ravenswood Hospital is proud of the in-depth training that is part of the medical residents, University of Illinois and nursing school student curriculum. In addition, the psychiatry department provides in-house consultation to physicians who have patients in the hospital with medical problems that create mental stress. Psychiatrists and psychologists can provide "liaison services" to depressed cancer patients, medical patients undergoing substance withdrawal or new mothers experiencing post-partum anxiety according to Godbole.

"Our teaching responsibility sets us apart from other mental health hospitals, and helps us to excel clinically on both mental health units and within the hospital as well," Godbole stated.

MEN ACCEPTING MORE THERAPY

Mental health experts have identified another reason behind the public's rising acceptance of therapy. In the past men had more trouble disclosing their fears and upsets to a trained professional than they do today. Social custom held that it was more appropriate for women to seek out a professional therapist. But observers report that the traditional-borne inhibitions men have are breaking down, partly on the strength of the need for treatment and because of progressive new attitudes as well.

RAVENSWOOD PSYCHIATRISTS DISCUSS THE TREATMENT OF MENTAL ILLNESS by David Cohen

Another element at work in the profession is the natural evolution of psychiatric theory and practice. The profession of course was founded by Dr. Sigmund Freud at the turn of the century in Vienna. Since then, and particularly in the last ten to fifteen years, new ideas have entered the therapeutic mainstream: Carl Jung's theory of archetypes, modified traditional Freudian theory, and more recently Otto Kernberg's "object relations" school.

One of the most critical additions to the arsenal of care has been the work of the late Heinz Kohut, a Chicago practitioner and writer. Kohut founded the school of "self-psychology," which concentrates on reconstructing the patient's personality. Building the patient's self-image by offering a sympathetic ear that confirms the patient's value and worth is one of the cornerstones of "Kohutian" therapy, which has attracted the warm devotion of local clinicians.

"Psychiatry is not static, and additions and modifications are natural," commented Dr. Irving Kagen, a member of the Ravenswood Hospital Department of Psychiatry. "Freudian practitioners try to resolve the Oedipus complex. Kohutians work on what we call narcissistic personality disorders, or injuries to the patient's self-image.

"The modern psychiatrist can use different models for different patients. And certainly doctors can do things better than they could 30 years ago, with the advances in biochemistry," Kagen said.

NEW DRUGS ASSIST CARE

Dr. Kagen and other practitioners report "a tilt" toward the use of drugs to treat many disorders, principally anxiety and depression. Fluoxetine, an antidepressant commonly known by the brand name Prozac, in particular has drawn a good deal of attention in the past year, some of it negative. But many in the profession consider it one of the most important advances in drug therapy to have reached the public in decades.

Practitioners praise the drug's ability to enhance the supply of serotonin in the brain, a step that appears to explain Prozac's role in combatting depression.

An especially valuable quality of Prozac is that it comes with few of the side effects characteristic of other antidepressants. "You had to be horribly depressed to justify taking the other drugs in the past," noted

Dr. Crystal Lembke, a psychiatrist and a member of the Ravenswood Community Mental Health Center. "Typical side effects included constipation, drowsiness, a sense of feeling wooden, and dryness in the mouth. Prozac is much more elegant. It works and often does no

"We're better at recognizing illnesses today and patients have become more comfortable at presenting themselves for examination,"

“More children live with parents who have an addiction problem. Child abuse and in particular child sexual abuse is pervasive.”

more than produce a mild anxiety.”

These constructive changes in psychiatry are coming at a time when the public is experiencing a heightened need for counselling of all kinds, observers report. The stress of modern life seems to

increase decade by decade. And as family and friends grow more remote, people find fewer sympathetic listeners to turn to for advice and support. The economy has been unstable, the workplace is insecure, and the family, in the somber words of Dr. Lembke, “has disintegrated.” This engenders new troubles for the public, of course, but among the most seriously injured are children. They have become the victims of what might be called The Tragedy of the American Family.

CHILDREN AND THERAPY

“The number of stresses that kids are exposed to has increased a lot,” lamented Carroll Cradock, Ph.D., program director for the Ravenswood Community Mental Health Child and Adolescent Center. “Children are exposed to many more changes that tax their coping capacity. More families move more often. More children have parents who separate, divorce and remarry, and that presents a whole set of additional problems.

“More children live with parents who have an addiction problem. Child abuse and in particular child sexual abuse is pervasive. The school systems have cut back on essential social services and the state’s Department of Children and Family Services bears an increasing burden of more and more kids with a reduced staff.”

Dr. Cradock noted that the magnitude of sexual abuse became apparent only ten years ago, after Illinois and many other states enacted legislation that required hospitals and other social welfare agencies to report incidents of abuse to a state hotline. It then became evident that the crime was much more extensive than healthcare professionals had imagined. They now estimate that perhaps one child in three is the victim of sexual abuse.

“I think the divorce rate is stabilizing,” said Dr. Cradock, “but there’s no evidence that these other problems are getting better. There is definitely a greater need for mental health services in general, but there are fewer programs in place because of a lack of financial support.”

“The available network in the community to sustain these kids is becoming more fragmented and less able to cope with these social problems,” Cradock said. Fortunately, Ravenswood Hospital has a comprehensive Child and Adolescent program to assist children under age 18 with mental health problems as well as programs for adult couples, individuals and families.