

MEMORANDUM

Mental Hygiene Program

Recently I have had occasion to ask various persons working in the field of psychiatry and related activities to state their conception of what a mental hygiene program would provide. It is interesting to note that without exception the general attitude of all those consulted has been as follows:

The mental hygiene program consists in the provision of adequate agencies for the early diagnosis and treatment of various forms of mental disease, conduct disorders, delinquencies, mal-adjustments and so on. Each individual stresses some one agency in this general scheme such as child guidance clinics, psychiatric service in high schools or colleges, better training of psychiatric social workers and so on.

It should be noted that these views of mental hygiene are based on the notion that professional services must be multiplied to reach every person whose condition or behavior has sufficiently deviated from norm to attract attention. Thus it may be said that the present conception of mental hygiene is that of extending the professional services of the psychiatrist, the psychologist and psychiatric social worker to those who through inheritance or early experience have become warped and distorted.

It is obvious that such programs can be considered as mental hygiene only in so far as diagnosis and treatment of the difficult pre-school children are preventive of problem children in the school,

the diagnosis and treatment of the pre-adolescent is preventive of difficulties in adolescence and so on. But it is equally clear that nothing in the way of a mental hygiene program designed to prevent the need of this diagnosis and treatment service has been worked out. It need scarcely be added that no techniques or methods for such a mental hygiene program have been developed since no one has contemplated such a program of prevention. When one considers the limited facilities for medical education and the still more limited facilities for the training of psychiatrists, it is obvious that a mental hygiene program of the kind described by psychiatrists is impossible of realization no matter how large financial support might be supplied, since the very essence of this program lies in the provision of professional diagnosis and treatment for practically every family in the country, starting with those whose deviations are the most marked.

The above described situation is of considerable interest in the light of the proposal for a parent training program which is essentially a mental and physical hygiene program, in that it seeks to train parents in the intelligent care of their children whereby the mental and physical handicaps arising from ignorance and neglect will be prevented. That is to say parent training is the only method seemingly in which a truly hygiene or preventive program can be carried out. This does not mean that for years to come the diagnostic and treatment service will not be necessary so that there is no antagonism or competition between the two lines of approach and, as suggested above, parent training is not limited to mental hygiene but embraces

the education of parents in whatever is essential to the development of wholesome individuals which includes the health of the child.

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