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Special Issue
Community Psychiatry Then and Now
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COMMUNITY PSYCHIATRY THEN AND NOW: AN INTRODUCTION

Allen R. Dyer, M.D., Ph.D.

The papers included in this special issue of Psychiatric Quarterly were presented at a symposium in honor of Alan M. Kraft, M.D. on April 17, 1991 at the Capital District Psychiatric Center (Alan Kraft Auditorium) in Albany, N.Y. Alan Kraft was chairman of the Department of Psychiatry at Albany Medical College from 1967 to 1990 and was the founding director of the Capital District Psychiatric Center. When I was asked to succeed Alan Kraft as the (interim) chairman of the department by then Dean of Albany Medical College, Nancy Gary, I asked Dr. Gary for funds to support this symposium. She immediately agreed, and the current dean, Dr. Anthony Tartaglia, concurred. The theme of the symposium, “Community Psychiatry Then and Now,” looks historically at the organization of psychiatric services, the community psychiatry movement, in which Alan Kraft has played such a significant role. It also looks at the enduring issues, which continue to concern those involved in organizing services for those who suffer from mental illness.

Alan Kraft came to Albany in 1967 from the Fort Logan Mental Health Center in Colorado. He is a graduate of the Chicago Medical School and trained at the Menninger Foundation. When he

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assumed the Directorship of the Fort Logan Mental Health Center in 1961, "Community Psychiatry" was still in its infancy. *Action for Mental Health* was still to be published. Influenced by the work of Maxwell Jones, Alan Kraft decided to mold Fort Logan into a community mental health center with the concept of the therapeutic community at the core of the program.

In the six years he spent as Director of Fort Logan, Alan Kraft was able to make that institution a model for the country. The American Psychiatric Association recognized his creativity in awarding Fort Logan its Achievement Award in 1965. Alan Kraft’s prominence in community psychiatry was recognized when he was asked to write the chapter on the Therapeutic Community in the *American Handbook of Psychiatry* in 1966. He became known as a psychiatrist who advocated the release of patients and their integration into the community.

His belief that many patients could be treated successfully in the community without resorting to inpatient admission was instrumental in his coming to Albany to develop the Capital District Psychiatric Center (CDPC). He arrived in Albany in 1968, but the CDPC did not have inpatient beds until 1975. The news media called CDPC the "phantom hospital," thinking that the epitaph was an indictment of the new facility. It was not. Rather it was a tribute to Alan Kraft, who was instilling a philosophy into his staff that many patients could be treated in their home setting without disruption of the family. He was able to develop a system of treatment settings in the community that enabled the CDPC to take some patients who were in distant state hospitals and return them to the Albany area where they were able to live near their families. Half-way houses, sheltered workshops, community interventions, home visits, all became routine.

In coming to Albany, Alan Kraft hoped that he would be able to instill his belief that the proper role for psychiatry was the treatment of the severely mentally ill. Since he was also Chairman of the Department of Psychiatry at the Albany Medical College, he was in a unique position to influence the training of young psychiatrists. And that he did. As Professor Reuben Silver, a member of the department throughout the Kraft era, observed, "He made community psychiatry such an integral part of the training program that residents may be unaware that they have been taught
community psychiatry. His practice, his teaching, his life—all have been in their service of community psychiatry."

Mel Sabshin, Medical Director of the American Psychiatric Association, in his keynote remarks preceding the symposium commended Alan Kraft for his vision in quoting from a 1971 article, "The Psychiatric Care System's Silent Minority" in the American Journal of Psychiatry (128:1, July 1971, 26–30):

Our findings support the development of a network of treatment modalities including a small inpatient facility but more importantly a group of supportive services that offer long-term social and psychological assistance to severely disabled people in their communities. Hospitalization of inpatients should be seen as in important but time-limited phase in treatment.

That principle was true then, it is true now, and it will remain true.

Dr. Sabshin went on to elaborate the place of community psychiatry in his perspective of the major turning points of American psychiatry. He identified four major turning points: 1) the rise of Meyerian psychobiology and its peak impact in the second quarter of the twentieth century, 2) the dominance of divergent therapeutic ideologies, including the important impact of psychoanalysis in the post-World War II years, 3) the current surge of neuroscience and psychopharmacology along with empiricism and logical positivism, 4) a predicted reemergence of analogues of Meyerian psychobiology at the turn of the twenty-first century accompanied by a) a new systematized psychobiology of coping, of adaptation, and of active efforts by persons to deal with multileveled stresses, b) an increased knowledge base in life course transactions converting the elaborate Meyerian history taking system to a more dynamic and relevant process, c) a trend toward a new nosological system that will give life and greater utility to the current axis IV and V systems and will deal more effectively with the boundaries between health and disorder, d) the reemergence of a vital new clinical psychiatry, e) a more balanced overall approach using psychoanalytic, social psychiatric, and biological concepts that have become clear enough to test empirically, and f) a more rational therapeutic system emphasizing new combinations and trans-
actions between pharmacotherapy and psychotherapy—along with
a new generation of educators experienced in these combinations.
His remarks largely followed his paper “Turning Points in American
Psychiatry” (American Journal of Psychiatry 147:10, October
1990, 1267-74) and are not reprinted here.

At Dr. Sabshin’s invitation, Dr. Walter Barton, his predecessor
as Medical Director of the APA, drafted a response and at my
invitation, he shared his perspective in remarks made at the sym-
posium. Dr. Barton’s remarks are included in this issue.

The morning of the symposium addressed historical issues. Ger-
ald N. Grob, one of the foremost historians of American Psychi-
atriy, reviewed mental health policy in modern America “From
hospital to community. Alan Miller, who served as Commissioner
of the NYS Office of Mental Health from 1966 to 1975 and was one
of the main architects of the NYS mental health system (who hired
Alan Kraft and helped bring him to Albany) reflected insightfully
on the lessons to be learned from that history.

Eleven o’clock on Wednesdays is traditionally grand rounds time
in Albany, and at that hour, Albany’s senior professor of psychi-
atriy, Lawrence C. Kolb, M.D., presented a grand rounds on his work
on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder complete in the best grand
rounds tradition with a first person patient account.

After lunch, Dr. Kraft was presented with a plaque which read
as follows:

Presented by
The Department of Psychiatry
ALBANY MEDICAL COLLEGE
to
ALAN MYRON KRAFT, M.D.
In Recognition of
Three Decades of
Contributions and Dedication
On the Occasion of the Symposium:
Community Psychiatry Then and Now
April 17, 1991

He then offered his own reflections which are included herein. Dr.
Barton spoke next, and his impromptu comments have been tran-
scribed for inclusion herein.
The afternoon presentations focused on current policy issues and future challenges. Dr. Joseph English, having just been elected president-elect of the American Psychiatric Association, offered his congratulations to Alan Kraft as his first official act. His remarks addressed the political-economic context of the community mental health movement. Richard Surles, currently commissioner of the NYS Office of Mental Health, looked toward a national mental health policy. In looking to the future we build on the foundations laid in the past.