

4. The Need for Public Education

The growing acceptance of mental illness as "just another kind of sickness" has helped remove the stigma that once was associated with mental illness and has permitted the integration of hospitals and clinics more closely in the functionings of society. This means that more people feel free to avail themselves of psychiatric care, and thus we may expect a progressively higher demand for service for some time to come. This rate will be bolstered by a greater understanding of mental illness which will permit diagnosis of conditions formerly not considered to be psychiatric in nature. Off-setting the increase, to a greater or lesser extent, will be the improvement in treatment methods.

This emphasizes the need for a continuous co-ordinated program of public education to ensure that the services available are used to the best advantage. It also implies, of course, special educational activities which will involve and utilize the skills of general practitioners, nurses, public health officials, school authorities, welfare agencies and others who are concerned with the individual as he functions in his environment and in his relationship to other people.

In the eight years since the National Health Program was introduced, services for the prevention and treatment of mental illnesses have materially improved. Signs of progress can be seen in new community mental health clinics, in new psychiatric services in general hospitals, in new training programs, in new emphasis on research, in new buildings and improved services in mental hospitals. As Canada's population grows, and as the public becomes more and more aware of what can be done both to prevent and to treat mental illness, the demands for service on both governments and private agencies can be expected to grow still more. And so, during this national Mental Health Week we could set ourselves no finer objective than to work for freedom from mental illness -- freedom from everything that cripples or restrains the creative, productive capacities of the individual Canadian. This is an important goal for all who serve the cause of good health.

RP/A

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