

THE COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES



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July 11, 1960

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HONORABLE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
 County of Los Angeles
 501 Hall of Records

Gentlemen:

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REPORT ON ROLE OF PSYCHOLOGY AND FUNCTIONS OF DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH

On April 5, 1960, your Board adopted an order creating the Department of Mental Health and instructing this office to answer three specific questions, including:

- Should the psychology profession be represented on the membership of the Mental Health Advisory Board?
- Should a position of Chief Psychologist be created in the departmental organization?
- What are the functional requirements of the department?

The first two of these questions have undoubtedly been raised because psychology has a specialized contribution to make to the alleviation of mental illness. Psychologists are scientists who specialize in the study of mental processes and can bring important knowledges and skills to bear upon psychiatric problems. Psychiatrists are physicians who have medical responsibility for the diagnosis and treatment of mental illness. Psychologists provide valuable assistance in diagnostic studies and in carrying out treatment procedures under medical supervision.

There are nine budgeted psychologist positions involved in treatment services supported under the County's Short-Doyle program, all of them working as members of treatment teams under the direction of psychiatrists who have ultimate medical responsibility for patients. The regulations of the State Department of Mental Hygiene, established pursuant to the Short-Doyle Act, require that all services in Short-Doyle programs be supervised by psychiatrists.

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MOTION

EM HAHN
 DEBS
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Receive and file

JUL 19 1960

While recognizing the contributions which psychology makes to the field of mental health, an expansion of the emphasis on psychology in the County mental health program either by appointment of psychologists to the Mental Health Advisory Board, or by adding a position of Chief Psychologist to the staff is not recommended at this time, primarily for the following reasons:

1. There are no vacancies on the Advisory Board at the present time; when vacancies occur, a policy requiring selection on the basis of professional affiliation would be too restrictive.
2. Neither the Director, Mental Health Services, nor this office sees a present essential need for a position of Chief Psychologist; the responsibilities of such a position, if established, might be in conflict with those of psychiatrists who have line authority over the psychologists who are involved in the program.

Detailed answers to the three questions follow:

1. Representation of Psychology on Mental Health Advisory Board

The Southern California Psychological Association, in addressing your Board through its President, Alvin Lasko, Ph.D., on April 5, requested that consideration be given to appointing a psychologist or psychologists to the Los Angeles County Mental Health Advisory Board. Your Board had previously filled all memberships on the Advisory Board, in conformance with Section 9006 of the Welfare and Institutions Code. This section outlines the required membership of the 7-man Advisory Board, stating that 3 members must be physicians engaged in the private practice of medicine, 1 member must be the chairman of the local governing body, and 1 member must be a Superior Court judge. The other 2 members, according to the code, "shall be persons representative of the public interest in mental health." In making appointments to these two latter memberships, your Board has clearly carried out the intent of the law as interpreted by the administering agency, by naming two persons on the basis of their known representation of broad mental health interests in the community at large, rather than on the basis of a particular professional affiliation.

The appointment of members to the Mental Health Advisory Board is your Board's prerogative within the framework established by State law. There is no bar to the future selection of psychologists to fill the memberships representative of the public interest in mental health. However, a policy requiring appointments to be based solely upon professional affiliation would rule out the appointment of all other persons not so affiliated, regardless of their known

representation of community interest in this field. Such a policy would unnecessarily restrict your Board in its selection of Advisory Board members, and would tend to violate the intent of the law.

2. Establishment of a Position of Chief Psychologist

Dr. Lasko also requested that consideration be given to the inclusion of a position of Chief Psychologist on the administrative staff of the Department of Mental Health. However, all administrative duties which might be assignable to a Chief Psychologist are now performed by the Director, Mental Health Services and other personnel now under his supervision. The creation of a position to perform more specialized duties in the field of psychology is viewed as a refinement which cannot be recommended at this time. Moreover, the establishment of such a position at the administrative level would tend to create confusion in the operations of the program, due to potential conflicts in authority and responsibility between the proposed Chief Psychologist and the psychiatrists who supervise psychologists working in the various treatment services supported by the Department of Mental Health. Again, as in the instance of appointment of psychologists to the Advisory Board, there is no bar to the appointment of a psychologist to the administrative staff of the Department of Mental Health if a future need is clearly established for such a position, and if lines of authority and responsibility can be clearly defined.

It is, however, the viewpoint of Dr. H. R. Brickman, M.D., Director, Mental Health Services, that the central office staff of his department would not be benefited by the appointment of administrative personnel whose purpose would be to represent the interests of a particular profession. He feels that when future development of the program requires the appointment of additional professional administrative staff, these appointments should be made on the basis of a demonstrated need for expertise in a particular function, such as mental health education or mental health consultation, rather than on the basis of representation of a specific profession. A copy of Dr. Brickman's letter to me, which expands further upon this subject, is attached.

3. Function of the Department

The function of the Department of Mental Health is to administer local community mental health services as outlined under Division 8 of the Welfare and Institutions Code. This Division provides for the alleviation of mental and emotional illnesses of residents of local jurisdictions through the establishment of inpatient, outpatient, and rehabilitation treatment services, and the preventive services of mental

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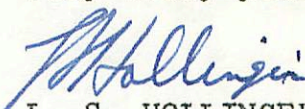
health consultation and mental health education. The Department administers these services, which have been established by your Board, in accordance with the laws and regulations of the State and the policies and directives of your Board.

Based on the above replies to each of the inquiries presented by your Board on April 5 concerning the participation of psychologists in the mental health program and the definite position taken by the Director, Mental Health Services that psychologists now are an essential part of the program and that there should be no change in the established professional relationship between psychiatrists and psychologists in the program,

IT IS RECOMMENDED:

That this report be received and filed.

Very truly yours,



L. S. HOLLINGER
Chief Administrative Officer

LSH:LWE

ERH:ym

cc: Each Supervisor
Southern California Psychological
Association
Director, Mental Health Services

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FILED



COUNTY of LOS ANGELES
MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Room 302, 1100 North Mission Road
Los Angeles 33, California

CAPITOL 53131

H. R. BRICKMAN, M.D.
Director

April 20, 1960

Mr. L. S. Hollinger
Chief Administrative Officer
County of Los Angeles
502 Hall of Records
Los Angeles 12, California

Dear Mr. Hollinger:

This communication is being sent to clarify the three points raised by Supervisor Hahn with regard to the functions of the Department of Mental Health.

The two points regarding the function of psychologists were raised in response to the public representations of two psychologists at the meeting of the Board of Supervisors on April 5.

With regard to these representations, it should first be noted that a careful check on my part with responsible psychologists in the community, including the chairman of the Public Relations Committee of one of the organizations supposedly represented at the public hearing, revealed that statements by these psychologists had not been cleared in advance with the membership of their societies. In addition, one of the psychologists misrepresented the status of the Suicide Prevention Center at the Los Angeles County General Hospital, stating that it was "led by psychologists." This is definitely contrary to the actual status of the Center, which is under the direction of Robert Litman, M.D., a psychiatrist. The psychologist-investigators in charge of the research project connected with the Suicide Prevention Center, Drs. Schneidman and Farberow, subsequently contacted me by telephone and expressed their dismay at this misrepresentation.

It should be further noted that neither these psychologists, nor the organizations they represent, made any prior official contact with our office in an attempt to familiarize themselves with the County's Mental Health program, and with the place of psychologists in this program.

These facts are included in this communication in order to apprise the Chief Administrative Officer and the Board of Supervisors of the degree of care and responsibility which went into these public statements.

With regard to whether psychology should be represented in membership of the Mental Health Advisory Board, it is not considered either necessary or desirable. The two members of the Board representative of the public interest in mental health have not been appointed because they solely represent a particular professional discipline, but rather because of their broad mental health interests in the community at large. There is no reason why a psychologist could not in the future be appointed to replace one of these two members upon expiration of tenure, but it is not felt it would be in the public interest to appoint such a person solely because he is a psychologist.

With regard to a possible position of chief psychologist in the staff organization, there is neither a necessity nor a precedent for administrative representation of psychology in the central office staff of a public mental health program. Psychologists are currently holding responsible professional positions within the program in their functions as diagnostic testers, as researchers, and as treatment personnel under medical direction. In no instance do they have administrative responsibility for these medical programs, since the principle of medical responsibility for the care of patients would otherwise be violated.

The central office staff of the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health would not be benefited by the appointment of administrative personnel whose purpose would be to represent the interests of a particular profession. With future development of the program, professional administrative staff should be appointed according to function, rather than to profession. For example, a psychologist with specific training and experience in mental health education might well be appointed in the future as chief of mental health education, should the necessity for such a position arise. In recruiting for such a position, a medical psychiatric background may not be essential, and such a position could be filled by either a psychologist or social worker with an appropriate background. It should be noted that in the instance of the State of California Department of Mental Hygiene, which is a large governmental mental health agency with the highest possible professional reputation, there is no position of chief psychologist.

-3- L. S. Hollinger

4-20-60

With regard to the functions of the Department of Mental Health, these are designed to implement the community mental health services program of the County of Los Angeles. The program provides for a locally administered series of mental health services reimbursable under the Short-Doyle act, and consisting of three kinds of clinical facilities directly serving patients (outpatient, inpatient and psychiatric rehabilitation services) and two kinds of services promoting the mental health of the community (mental health consultation and mental health education).

Please feel free to contact this office for any further details regarding these questions.

Sincerely,



H. R. Brickman, M.D.
Director

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