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The Program, the Psychiatrist and the Individual

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Society, business, the law, medicine and many other subgroups turn to the psychiatrist to answer the emotional woes of life. He is expected to become at once healer, judge, moderator, and when all that fails, the illumination of the decision-maker must shine through for all to receive direction. In recent years this has become more obvious as the distance from the suffering individual increases and the lofty, organizing position of the psychiatrist makes him the teacher of many, the researcher of much but the emotional companion in life of very few.

We have spread ourselves into many and varied areas, most quite important for the well-being of health programs. We have been asked to make decisions regarding the reasonableness of certain behaviors, behaviors which are often the product of despair, unemployment, lack of motivation, i.e., ways of here-and-now coping. We are supposed "to know" the how, what, why, with regard to the emotional outburst, the drunkenness, the marital strife, and the power seekers. It is rather sad that the conclusions and expectations are so often based on the requests for sweeping generalized answers to issues that disturb. I urge a re-evaluation of this expert's role.

In the maze of government grants, neurotransmitter discoveries, poverty, PSRO, drug and alcohol abuse, community and school programs and the highly capitalized "team approach of indirect patient care," the individual has been lost. We see little of the developing therapeutic relationship and less at times of the process of self-awareness which should be fostered through the living encounter of the seeker and the therapist.

We should speculate as to the apparent avoidance phenomena observed among many publicized mentors in the psychiatric world.

Serious thought should be given to the emotional drain on the therapist. To live in the world of the sufferer for the duration of the traditional psychotherapeutic visit is essential. To discard the obstacle of objective neutrality is often a must. The therapist must insert "the self of him" into the encounter, to live with that person through his pain until the time comes that the patient's own self-analysis is strengthened and redirected. This is bilaterally a very sobering and maturing experience. There is a large population of patients who benefit from a brief meeting revolving around a chemical form of treatment. I believe, however, there is even a larger population which receives such an approach and should not. This is, in my experience, as common within the private wing as it is in the clinics and community mental health centers. The economics of time, shortage of staff and the deficiency of funding are presented perennially as reasons. In the abstract such statements are often very true and one has difficulty contesting fiscally-oriented statistics. But the person is not a program. How does one convey to many well meaning, but I feel misguided, leaders who have drawn heavily on technological advances in the hope of finding "all" the answers? We must search but not to the exclusion of that very person within us. Is computerized certainty the goal? If so, we are navigating an exercise in futility. Sharing and living in the therapeutic session, is an inherent relatedness at the very foundation of medical practice.

In the final analysis, we have before us an ever-changing world viewed by many caught in the conformity of adhering to the surrounding momentum. This leaves no room for the necessary ingredient of freedom — a freedom (and responsibility) to look and search and choose. Caught in the labyrinth of programs and categories, the psychotherapist too often loses his individuality. How can he possibly assist another in redirecting a life process? The therapist himself is ensnared, stifled and crippled with worn-out models of technique, governmental dollars, aggrandizing control and a senseless struggle to compete in programs which constantly encourage intervention. The healer knows the way! Or does he? Will the "individual" please step forward?
