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WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH IN A UNIVERSITY?[1]

I can think of no greater pleasure than to be here on the occasion of your University of Nebraska Mental Health Institute, to help inaugurate, and to see in action, a first-class program devoted to the furtherance of a side of education that has been largely ignored in the past. The fact that a major university has taken upon itself the task of training its student in the realm of feelings and emotions as well as in matters intellectual, is a cause not only for hope and gratification, but for congratulations as well. Whether we live together in this world in peace and harmony, or destroy ourselves by hatred, aggressiveness, jealousy, or frustration, is a matter of utmost concern. Where

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is there a better place than in an educational institution such as this for learning to understand one another, mastering the give-and-take methods of democracy, and devising ways and means of removing obstacles to good living without destroying the social structure itself?

Sir Richard Livingston, in the recent discussion of "Education and the Spirit of the Age," stated that our present-day education is defective in that it lays too exclusive a stress on analysis. As he says, a stock injunction to teachers is, "Teach the pupil to think. Give him a critical mind." While he admits that this is of immense importance, "to teach people to see and feel is more important still." "The best way to make a person critical is to show him the first-rate till anything inferior ceases to attract." Or again, "In every one the poet should keep company with the rationalist: then we have the highest type of educated man."

My chief object to-day will be to discuss the "poetic" element of education in contrast with the rational, though possibly in a slightly different sense from that which Sir Richard had in mind. The alteration of meaning will not be violent, however; my colleague, Dr. Herbert I. Harris, has frequently stated that a chief purpose of psychotherapy is to enable the patient to become "the poet of his own feelings." If an education is the ability to read, write, speak, and listen, I would like to present the reasons why the ability to understand feelings should be added.

Before considering mental health we might set the stage by introducing the concept of health in general. Health is not simply the absence of disease, but, in terms of the World Health Organization definition, it "is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."

In the same vein we think of mental health —namely, as a state of mind that permits full and satisfying participation in whatever life has to offer. In terms of student experience, it

enables the individual to take the greatest possible advantage of the academic, extracurricular, and environmental offerings of the university. Therefore, it is not something new to be added to an already overloaded curriculum. It is not a technique, a doctrine, a limiting factor, but, instead, it connotes freedom, responsibility, flexibility, and self-reliance. It is, therefore, a vital aid to traditional education, enriching both it and those who participate in the teaching process, the teacher and the student. It is everybody's business.

Mental health is still thought of by many persons as the absence of emotional or mental illness. This idea has sound historical backing. The mental-hygiene movement in this country—which had its formal beginning in 1908, when Clifford Beers was instrumental in forming The National Committee for Mental Hygiene—was largely devoted to the purpose of improving the care and treatment of persons confined to mental hospitals, or asylums, as they were then called. Like Robert Hutchins, when he introduced Albert Schweitzer to his audience at Aspen, Colorado, in 1949, with the words, "We who are well need him even more than those who are sick," so we may say that mental health is more of a concern of those of us who are outside institutions than those who are within them. Mental health is a different concept to define; it is elusive, subject to unhappy exploitation by quacks and opportunists, but none the less rather simple. The trouble is that its principles call for action that is selfless, and at time sacrificial, and they are, therefore, hard to practice.

The individual who is well adjusted, in the words of The National Association for Mental Health, feels comfortable about himself, feels right about other people, and is able to meet the demands of life. He guides his emotional expressions, is tolerant, has a good sense of humor, respects himself and other people, is responsible, can relate himself to other people, and gets satisfaction from what he is doing. Perhaps Dr. George Preston summed up these qualities in the neatest and most witty form when he said that mental health consists in the ability to

live: (1) within the limits imposed by bodily equipment, (2) with other human beings, (3) happily (4) productively, and (5) without being a nuisance.

To admit the desirability of mental health in the individual is like accepting the idea that a balanced diet is a good thing, or that evil is undesirable, or that love is a better emotion than hatred. Its attainment in the individual is made much easier or much harder depending upon the person's own past experiences and on his present environment. The past cannot be changed, but one's reactions to it can be. Fortunately, our environment can be improved if we can decide on what should be done and how to go about doing it.

Not the least of the functions of a mental-health program on a university campus is that of pointing out to all members of the community the main obstacles to the attainment of mental health as far as the individual is concerned. Those of us who study the problems of students who come to us for aid are impressed repeatedly with the frequent, almost monotonous occurrence of a few general situations or conditions. Among these are parental friction, which may or may not involve divorce; lack of warm feelings and emotional flexibility in parents; in consistent or punitive application of discipline; distorted or squeamish attitudes about toilet and sex activities; and poor neigborhood environment. At times the young persons has not had suitable objects of identification because of lack of adequate masculine characteristics in the father or of feminine attributes in the mother.

The fact that these primary difficulties recur so often suggests that we, as college students, should plan the home we hope to establish with the idea in mind that these hindrances will be minimal. This is not to suggest that the growing child should be protected from the normal stresses and strains of growing up; rather it indicates that the ability to withstand hardship and conflict is vastly increased when home influences are good, and when the child can count on his relationships there with cons-

iderable certainty. As Santayana has said, the mind that has a good ballast can withstand a large portion of madness.

One of the main difficulties faced by those who are interested in improving parental attitudes toward children has been the lack of ability to present the proper facts without making the parents feel threatened, inadequate, or insecure themselves. Somehow, in such a mental-health program as this one, we must learn the technique communicating the principles of mental health without letting them become threatening or instruments of derogation. In medicine we are accustomed to deficiency diseases. For instance, lack of vitamin C gives rise to scurvy and lack of vitamin D causes rickets. It is just as clear to these who work with children that a deficiency of affection, of consistency, or of kind, but firm discipline gives rise to psychological syndromes that are just as harmful, even though less well defined, than those due to lack of vitamins in the diet. It seems logical, therefore, that we should plan the child's environment with as much care as we plan his diet. The difference, however, is that the diet can be bought with money, but the psychological environment requires continual thought and planning, with a great deal of self-discipline as well.

Mental health in a university has a great deal to do with teaching and learning, with emotional blocks to learning, with how teacher and student interact with one another. Does the faculty member think of his students as living, feeling, developing human beings, with an infinite variety of approaches to the problem of attaining maturity, or does he think of them as willing or unwilling receptacles into which a certain amount of knowledge must be poured? Do his teaching methods incite curiosity or rebellion? What are his attitudes toward himself and his relationships with others? Can he look at himself, evaluate his own strengths and short-comings, and still feel secure enough to say, "I don't know," when he does not know, or to deal with highly speculative or controversial material with confidence? Along these lines Sir William Osler thought in terms of the teacher aligning himself on the same side of the material as the student. Nearly fifty year ago he said:

> The successful teacher is no longer on a height, pumping knowledge at high pressure into passive receptacles. The new methods have changed all this. He is no longer Sir Oracle, perhaps unconsciously by his very manner antagonizing minds to whose level he cannot possibly descend, but he is a senior student anxious to help his juniors. When a simple, earnest spirit animates a college, there is no appreciable interval between the teacher and the taught—both are in the same class, the one a little more advanced than the other. So animated, the student feels that he has joined a family whose honor is his honor, whose welfare is his own, and whose interests should be his first consideration.

Mental health on a campus concerns itself with the attitudes of students and faculty members toward one another. The field of student counseling might be considered as an example of how necessary it is that those who work in it have mature and understanding attitudes toward one another as well as good understanding of themselves. Specifically, counseling of students may be done by psychologists, psychiatrists, vocational-guidance experts, social workers, ministers, coaches, and teachers generally.

If any one group assumes a vested interest in this field, assumes that it has the answers, and then becomes unnecessarily critical of others, the program suffers. One of my colleagues has said, "I have noticed that the person who does not feel rivalry toward others seldom notices rivalry from others." The field and the need of counseling is so great that empire building is not in order. In fact, I believe that the main portion of student counseling should be an integral part of the total relationship between the teacher and the student, and hence integrated with the intellectual relationship for which a college exists. Obviously, this point of view presents certain dangers. Is the ordinary faculty member equipped to do counseling effectively? May he not try to become a therapist, and hence let himself in for the dangers of all persons who work in fields for which they are not prepared?

I do not believe that the dangers of widespread counseling by faculty members are very marked if certain definite principles are kept in the foreground. The skills that are desirable are not of such a nature as to narrow the range of action of the counselor, nor do they stamp him as belonging to any particular school of thought. Some of the principles that, in general, influence the counselor's attitudes are as follows:

1. The chief function of the counselor is to help the student formulate his problem rather than to solve it for him.

2. Direct advice is usually not given, instead, the student is aided in discovering and weighing the alternate courses of action in a given situation.

3. The apparent situation that brings the student to seek help may not be the problem that concerns him most. He may not wish to divulge his chief concern until he is sure what reception he will get, or he may not be fully aware of what bothers him most.

4. The student's thoughts and behavior are considered objectively without the exercise of judicial functions of any kind during interviews, though the student may at times be encouraged to exercise judgment.

5. The counselor avoids probing into the student's private and personal affairs, but lets him divulge what he chooses in his own way and at his own rate. The counseling relationship continues even when the student is under professional care.

6. The counselor is under no obligation to help every student who comes to him or to find a solution to every problem. For many situations, there are no satisfactory solutions and a sensitive and intuitive understanding is about all that can be offered the student.

In addition to the fundamental job of the psychiatrist, the psychologist, the vocational counselor, or other professional person, of working with the individual student on some aspect of his growth and development, there is another equally important function of an educational nature. Some one has said that

psychotherapy is education and education is psychotherapy. Certainly, each process has many features of the other. Psychotherapy of the seriously disturbed patient might be thought of as one end of a spectrum and the educational process of the completely normal person —if there is such— as the other. Along this broad band the development of insight, skills, abilities, and all kinds of characteristics proceeds in the general direction of maturity, intellectual, emotional, and social, unless there is some interference. At one end of the band the teacher presides, and at the other, the psychologist, the social worker, or the psychiatrist performs his functions.

The basic goal of a college mental-health service is to organize the knowledge of human beings, as formulated by the psychological sciences generally and from therapeutic experiences with students specifically, in such a way as to make it useful to the teacher in his enormous responsibility of aiding the optimum development of the student. By verbalizing and understanding the main obstacles to the attainment of mental health in the individual and delineating the positive principles of mental hygiene, which psychiatry should be able to formulate, it is hoped that a larger partion of the spectrum can be supervised by the faculty member and that thus a correspondingly smaller burden will fall upon the professional in the field. In other words, the professional should devote his energy toward the end that his own services will not be necessary.

It must be conceded that not all good teachers are temperamentally suited to be counselors. Some may have duties so pressing that they cannot spare the time that is needed. The influence of others on students may not be wholly desirable. It should be remembered, however, that the primary purpose of an educational institution is the training and education of young people, and that research and public service exist in part to broaden and deepen this purpose. Hence, any contact between a faculty member and a student becomes in one sense a counseling situation, good or bad. The teacher who is aware of his own capacities, of the effect he has on others, who understands

other people. and how they feel about matters of little and great import, is in a position to exert an influence for good on his students far out of proportion to the time spent with them.

A faculty riddled by feuds, by jealousies, by insecurity, and lacking in deep purpose, communicates these attitudes to students more readily than if its members deliberately taught harmful concepts. The result is low morale of students, ethical short-cuts, the acting out of problems in the form of antisocial behavior—a mirroring of the principles they see in action.

I think it a reasonable statement to make that the teacher who develops the counseling attitude, who tries to take into consideration the host of factors, conscious and unconscious, that influence learning, not only becomes thereby a better teacher, but helps himself as much or more than he helps his students.

One of the chief problems of the college student is the attainment of independence or emancipation from his parents in such a way as to retain their friendship and respect, as well as to feel that he has established himself as an independent person in his own right. If he comes to college and finds that he is still treated as a child, that he is hemmed in with restrictions and rules, and that he is not trusted, then he will react exactly as he would at home, by rebelling or by some other equally unsatisfactory type of activity. The college environment is then simply a dilution of his home environment, with most of its disadvantages and but few of its advantages.

The principle that abrupt use of authority invites resistance has been known probably as long as teachers and students have thought about their respective roles. Dr. Franklin Carter, himself a president of Williams College, once wrote of one of his predecessors, Mark Hopkins, who was president from 1836 to 1872:

> Dr. Hopkins was not a believer in rigid rules... He depreciated that antagonism which rigid and minute rules were, he

> thought, sure to engender. He believed fully in the general influence of a faithful and earnest body of teachers, and thought that young men could be far more effectually guided to true manliness by an example of kindness and patience than by formal restrictions or constant intimations that they were under authority. He was... equally opposed to any very definite system of penalties. It was offensive to his ideas of proper training to treat all students in exactly the same way. His conviction was strong that all students are not precisely alike in their training or tendencies, or abilities.

I might add that many members of the Williams faculty strongly disagreed with the basic philosophy of Mark Hopkins, and once when he was out of town on a speaking tour, they passed a particularly drastic rule concerning absences, resulting in the famous "Rebellion of 1868," in which all but three students withdrew from all college exercises. On his return, four days later, Dr. Hopkins succeeded in effecting a compromise, resulting in a return of the students and a general saving of face all around.

A permissive attitude toward individual variations from acceptable behavior and good taste, coupled with firm, but kind insistence on higher standards, is not an easy thing to achieve on a college campus. Too much freedom and responsibility may not be well handled by young undergraduates, or may even be the source of anxiety. The younger members of the community must realize that there are limits beyond which one cannot go without penalty. As Judge Learned Hand has so well stated: "A society in which men recognize no check upon their freedom soon becomes a society where freedom is the possession of only a savage few."

This suggests, therefore, that responsibility must go hand in hand with freedom. A climate of opinion must be generated which permits some deviant behavior from the social limits set by the community, but not enough to injure seriously the community and its standards. In short, a strong student gov-

ernment, backed solidly by informed student and faculty opinion, is one of the strongest possible educational instruments of the university community.

We are all well aware of many relationships between athletics and health, and how each contributes to the other. Even more important in the development of good mental health on a campus is the question of how and for whom athletic activities are planned and accomplished. I refer particularly to the acute question of the subsidization of athletes while in college.

I have recently been told that several administrators of athletic activities have been concerned as to the effect on the subsidized student of handling him a check or money once a month, compensation which cannot be freely admitted, and which is acquired in a manner remarkably similar to undercover deals in dishonest politics. Does this increase the student's sense of responsibility? Does it help train him to be on the lookout for graft in the handling of public affairs? Or does it cause him to detect insincerity, and value honesty and integrity? The questions answer themselves, but it takes more than intellectual conviction to stand up to the pressures of those groups who demand winning teams at any price.

Gresham's Law states that bad money tends to drive good money out of circulation. Certainly there must be a similar principle at work in colleges and universities in which sharp practices in athletics tend to crowd out desirable ones. Mental health in a university does concern itself with athletics for all students who wish to participate, and with how they shall be administered. When athletic directors, faculty members, college presidents, and alumni unite in demanding no special favors for any one group of students over another, we shall have made a real start in attaining maturity.

Since colleges and universities are under strong attack from many quarters at this time, it is one of the responsibilities of those interested in mental health to study the influences at work that promote or hinder freedom. Some new factors seem to have entered the thinking of our people, something that is

influencing our usual concepts of public morality in a profound way. Loyalty to the basic principles that have governed American thinking since the formation of the nation seems to many in our country to be something different from what the rest of us had supposed it to be. Pressure groups with rather nationalistic and selfish ends in view have demanded agreement with their views, and for those who do not agree, the price to pay is that of being denounced as "disloyal." The simple principle that any individual is presumed innocent of wrong-doing unless he has been proven guilty has been replaced in some measure by the concept that if some one has made accusations against another, then that person must have been up to something improper. Clearing of one's name after such charges does not serve to repair the lasting damage that has been done by the publicity of the accusations. Association with others, whether in the past, accidental, or even on an involuntary basis, is being increasingly used as a means of impugning loyalty. Suspicion of the colleges and universities, always present at least in a latent form, has been encouraged in such a way as to suggest that they are "hotbeds" of subversive teaching. From all this there has naturally arisen the fear on the part of many teachers, as well as students, that if they express opinions on political subjects or about politicians, they will later be subject to reprisals.

In such an atmosphere of doubt and suspicion, in which the accuser does not have to face the accused, the informer tends to become overpublicized and possibly overpraised, thus furthering the tendency for people to spy on one another. This tends to break down our mutual confidence in one another, the very fabric that supports our democratic society. As President Killian of M.I.T. has phrased it, "You cannot build America up by tearing Americans down."

Freedom has never been easy to attain or to keep, and as we see it threatened in so many ways, we need to mobilize resistance to all those who would deprive us of it. It is not a simple question. It will not be easy to solve, and anger and dismay are of no help. What is needed is a deep, sober consideration on the part

of all of us of the significance of the changes that are taking place daily around us, followed by a strong determination to point out the dangers and suggest possible remedies before it is too late.

In colleges and universities those who are working closely with students are well aware that they have an infinite variety of difficulties to overcome in their efforts to get the most out of their years of formal education. That students, like all the rest of us, need help from time to time, is obvious. Whether it is a proper function of a university to aid the students in securing that help is a matter of policy, with some of us believing that it should, and others, possibly a majority, believing that treatment of illness is outside the domain of an educational institution. The latter point of view in the field of mental health has at times been expressed in some such form as this: "A student is either well or he is not well. If he is sick enough to need the services of a psychiatrist, he is not well enough to remain in college. Therefore, there is no need for a psychiatrist in an educational institution."

Important as we may consider the treatment of sick students, that is not the area in which the psychiatrist may be of greatest usefulness to a college. At the same time the fact cannot be dismissed that from experience derived from the treatment of students the necessary background and knowledge are obtained that are so necessary in working effectively with student-government officials, counselors, faculty members, and the administration. If there is but one psychiatrist connected with a large university, he is always faced with a serious dilemma as to how he shall divide his time in view of the overwhelming demands made on him. If he sees students exclusively, the broader educational aspects of his program suffer. If he sees too few individual students as patients, his firm foundation of knowledge and experience becomes weakened, and the educational program will seem thin and artificial. An approximately equal distribution of time between these two aspects of his work is probably a desirable goal.

But what is the educational aspect of which the college psychiatrist talks so much and whose principles he values so highly? A primary responsibility is to help develop the idea that there is far more to education than the pure development of the intellect. The emotional concomitants of learning are as basic as the material itself. From this it follows that how one feels about oneself, about others, about one's subject matter, and what one's motivations are, may make all the difference between the sterile, unimaginative, pedantic person and the warm, considerate, sensitive, self-reliant one who is creative and capable of implementing his knowledge.

In some institutions the representatives of it are said to be charming and agreeable when they want something from a visitor, but cold and discourteous in manner when the visitor wants something from them. Students notice similar behavior in university employees and react to it by criticism, hostility, or anxiety, but if the attitudes are friendly, they react with friendliness. This is a concern of mental health; their attitudes show through, and such attitudes are a proper concern of the psychiatrist.

Those who practice psychotherapy are frequently as unable to explain improvement in some of their patients as they are to understand why others do not improve. Frequently the answer to either of these questions lies in the way the two individuals react upon one another. The therapist may influence the patient as much by what he is, and by what he represents to the patient, as by what he does to him. Similarly, the teacher, in the class-room or in his less formal contacts with students, may influence them out of all proportion to the bare recital of what was seen to go on. As Sidney Hook has recently pointed out, the teacher is frequently unaware of how much he may influence the life, ideals of conduct, standards of judgment, secret ambitions and hopes, or even the choice of a life career, of his students.

Whatever else he may do, however, he must try to make himself dispensable, so that the process of education, once begun

in college and earlier, may become increasingly autonomous. As Hook emphasizes, to develop this capacity for self-education in his students the teacher must aim for emotional and intellectual maturity.

Emotional and intellectual maturity are essentially one, in the same sense as mind and body are one. Hook's observations on maturity are so fundamental that a further consideration of them is quite enlightening. To him, emotional maturity connotes, the *habit of reasonable expectation*, not a course of blind optimism or hysterical giving in to fear or apathy. Knowledge of things is not sufficient to achieve it. It seems to depend more upon knowledge of self and others, upon historical perspective and "an awareness of how the best of men fall far short of their own ideals. It is acquired slowly, cannot be forced, and, like most virtues, is more likely to be achieved by indirection."

"Intellectual maturity," on the other hand, "is manifest in the capacity for reasonable assessment of evidence." The mature person does not assume that knowledge in one field carries over into another. His thinking varies, depending on the field of interest. It is effective "only when it reveals command of subject matter." It implies respect for, but no worship of, facts.

Mental health is concerned with discipline and preferably the kind that the individual exercises on himself, not the punitive variety. The more the whole problem of individual deviations from acceptable behavior can be handled by the students themselves through a responsible student government, the more likely it is that suitable behavior will be taken for granted.

Discrimination of all types likewise falls under the scrutiny of any one interested in developing the highest type of value judgments which we may identify as an expression of mental health. Possibly a chief function of education is to enable the individual to exercise intelligent discrimination in favor of the good, the beautiful, the first-rate in all fields, but certainly education has failed in its mission when those who think they have it prejudge individuals without knowing anything whatever

about their personal characteristics. Our discriminatory practices in this country are among the greatest hindrances toward our developing any real moral and spiritual leadership in the world. As the song, *You Have to be Carefully Taught,* in *South Pacific* suggests, intolerance has to be taught early if it is to be really strong. Tolerance may perhaps be a more natural trait than its opposite.

Sometimes curious customs arise in our colleges that have long-term effects of unexpected nature. Medical-excuse systems frequently lead to gross exaggeration of illness when secondary gains are needed. Using required attendance at all class exercises as a punishment may suggest the opposite idea from the true one —the idea that the chief privilege of going to college is going to class. Many customs in the management of laboratory sections result in practices that strongly suggest plagiarism in that it is well known that solutions are always kept on file in various student centers all over the campus. Many probation systems are designed to limit further a student's social contacts when his interpersonal relationships are already seriously disturbed. In these and many other similar fields, we can see room for improvement through thoughtful self-analysis.

We emphasized earlier that the college sometimes appears to the student to be a diluted version of home. In many ways this is desirable if those conditions that perpetuate dependence are minimized and those that develop independence are encouraged. From the standpoint of developing an environment in which true maturity can be attained most readily, we need good communication at all levels in the university, from faculty to student, student to student, and student to faculty, thus engendering the feeling of belonging. Communication between members of a very large heterogeneous group is very difficult and hence small groups have to be developed in which meaningful relationships for individuals can be encouraged. A permissive attitude, with much tolerance of individual eccentricities, is desirable, but it must be accompanied by a climate of opinion that fosters real discipline —namely, that which is self-administered. The

individual should always be considered, but whatever concession is made to personal situations should not result in any lowering of academic or ethical standards.

If Sir Richard Livingstone is correct in his assumption that continued exposure to the first-rate results in dissatisfaction with the inferior, then we in the universities should be satisfied with nothing less than the best in true mental health on our own home grounds.