

EDITORIAL

Orthopsychiatry in the 21st Century

A fundamental task of orthopsychiatry is the study of the behavior of the total personality and its integration in varied, perplexing, and traumatic total life situations.

—Lawson Lowery, MD (1948, p. 1)

For more than eight decades, the American Orthopsychiatric Association (“Ortho”) has been a leading advocate for a simple but revolutionary idea: The mental health of individuals depends on their social context. Prevention has been the goal, based on the belief that fostering mental health in family, school, and community contexts will reduce risk for mental disorder (Eisenberg & DeMaso, 1985). From its inception in 1924, Ortho has evolved into a force for the development of new knowledge and techniques in practice, as well as in the integration of sound scholarship with social and human rights policy development around the globe (Melton, 2003). The organization continues to facilitate a shared commitment to melding scholarship, clinical expertise, and social concern to inform professional practice and public policy.

Founded in 1930, the *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry (AJO)* has proceeded “from the implicit assumption that teaching and learning cross disciplinary lines; it embodies the explicit premise that no single viewpoint is able to account for the vicissitudes of behavior” (Eisenberg & DeMaso, 1985, p. x). Today, *AJO: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Mental Health and Social Justice* continues to foster development of theory, practice, research, and social policy, from interdisciplinary perspectives: biological, psychological, social, and cultural.

Traditionally and characteristically, the journal has been at the forefront of new approaches to enduring problems. A review of its first 50 years is an inspirational journey which reveals “the proudest characteristics of this Association and its *Journal*: a consistent commitment to the least fortunate members of society, both in terms of clinical services to individuals and a leadership for social change” (Eisenberg & DeMaso, 1985, p. xviii). Seminal articles have spanned a wide range of topics, encompassing childhood psychosis, psychopharmacology, school phobia, depression, suicide, child abuse, mental retardation, chronic illness and hospitalization, and treatment. Is it any wonder that Ortho was the genesis for new approaches and modalities, including family therapy, group therapy, the community mental health movement, and a range of initiatives in services and treatment (Eisenberg & DeMaso, 1985; Melton, 2003)?

Focus on Community at Home and Abroad

Mental health professionals with an Ortho perspective have long advocated a focus on community settings, particularly schools, as a key settings for health promotion and preventive intervention programs for children and youth, a view now shared internationally (WHO, 2004, p. 30). This perspective is reflected in the last article of this issue, “Children Enrolled in Public Pre-K: The Relation of Family Life, Neighborhood Quality, and Socio-Economic Resources to Early Competence” by Oscar Barbarin and his colleagues, which contributes to greater understanding of how the complex interplay in between parental, family, and neighborhood characteristic related to mental health-related outcomes in children.

It is also reflected in the focus of the 2006 Ortho Summer Awards Symposium in the Cape Cod institute, titled “Caring for Children in Schools, Health Clinics, Places of Worship, and Other Community Settings” (see www.cape.org for more information), presidential initiatives and task forces working on critical issues (Willis, 2006; Melton, 2005), and in plans for two *AJO* special issues related to building resilience in communities, including communities who must rebuild in the wake of a natural disaster such as Hurricane Katrina. Not only will such efforts communicate knowledge that can be applied in local settings to foster improved mental health—the lessons learned can be adapted and shared around the globe.

Mental Health in Global Perspective

Why is the inclusion of “Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Mental Health and Social Justice” in this journal’s title particularly apt for orthopsychiatry in the 21st century?

According to reports from the World Health Organization (WHO), an estimated 450 million people around the globe suffer from mental and behavioral disorders—one person in four will develop one or more of these

disorders during their lifetime. Psychiatric conditions make up 5 out of 10 leading causes of disability and premature death worldwide. Protecting human rights is now internationally recognized as a major strategy to prevent mental disorders (WHO, 2004).

As Benedetto Saraceno (2004) has pointed out, mental health is inextricably linked to human rights and social justice issues through the stigma, discrimination, and human rights violations experienced by individuals affected by mental disorders, as well as through the limitations on the basic human rights of vulnerable individuals and communities that may act as powerful determinants of mental disorders. Consequently, the World Health Organization has emphasized that effective prevention strategies—which include improving nutrition, education, access to employment and economic security, and eliminating gender and racial discrimination—are harmonious with principles of social equity and equal opportunity (Saraceno, 2004, p.3).

These strategies can be said to reflect “Ortho perspective” in that they recognize (1) the powerful influence of the social context on mental health outcomes, and (2) the concomitant need to develop strategies to change the social and environmental conditions that negatively affect those outcomes. The effectiveness of such strategies will depend on the knowledge base used to construct them, and this journal is committed to fostering and disseminating that knowledge.

The Ortho Adventure Continues

As I reflect on the rapid pace of change around the world and what it means for “orthopsychiatry” in the 21st century, I am reminded of the words of the legendary Margaret Mead, an Ortho author who advocated for a global perspective on mental health (Mead, 1962), and who also cogently observed “We are now at a point where we must educate our children about what no one knew yesterday and prepare our schools for what no one knows yet.”

The point can be applied to the preparation and training of mental health professionals. As globalization proceeds apace, the need to understand how aspects of the social and cultural context affect mental health and well-being has become ever more apparent—and ever more complex. At no time in the history of the field has the development and application of an “ortho” perspective in research, training, and practice been more needed.

I am honored to serve as *AJO* editor and to be able to work with four outstanding Associate Editors: Andres J. Pumariega, MD, Wanda K. Mohr, PhD, RN, FAAN, Kenneth S. Thompson, MD, and Karen Fraser Wyche, MSW, PhD. We are working on several projects, including a special section on residential treatment that Andy is editing.

With this issue, we launch a new program that will benefit all journal readers, but particularly Ortho members. Ortho has made arrangements with the RedToad Road Company to award continuing education credits and continuing medical education credits for reading designated accredited articles that appear in the *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*. Barbarin et al.’s lead article in this issue is the first one to be designated for this program, and the special section on residential treatment that will appear in the July issue will be the second. Procedures for earning CE/CME credit are described on page xxx and also on the Ortho website: www.amerorg.org.

There have been many changes this past year for the Journal as well as for Ortho overall, and at times the transition has been rocky. But we are now on course with a wonderful team in place, including Megan Sauter and Sonya Bettendorf, who have been working very hard to ensure that the manuscripts in our extremely large publication queue will be processed in a timely manner. Too many interesting manuscripts is a great problem to have, but nonetheless, a long publication queue is a problem. I am delighted that with this volume we have a new look with larger pages, which will be a great help in solving it. We are also going to explore ways extend our capacity by creative uses of cyberspace—you will learn more about that in the next issue. Stay tuned.

—Nancy Felipe Russo, PhD, Editor

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