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58 Organizing Human Services in Florida by Laurence E. Lynn, Jr.

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Editorial Policy

Evaluation is an experimental magazine designed to draw together information on evaluation activities from mental health and other human service fields.

Some articles for Evaluation are actively solicited; unsolicited manuscripts are welcomed equally, but authors are encouraged to submit a 1-2 page query stating the major points of the proposed article and its approximate length. Original contributions are sought in any of the following areas, and in all cases authors are asked to consider and attempt to explicate the utility of their findings: new applications or sound re-applications of evaluation approaches; issues, problems, and successes related to past, present, or proposed evaluation efforts; changes in various programs as a result of the effects, intended or not, of evaluation efforts; and ways in which the skills of managers, researchers, and technical specialists have been used to develop evaluation designs. Guidelines for articles are available from Evaluation. Articles should not exceed approximately 15 double-spaced typewritten pages.

Short summaries (from 1-6 typewritten pages) are also welcomed, and should include the name and location of the program, the methodology developed and/or used, possible applications, any available findings, and the person to write to for further information. Those summaries describing the outcome or findings of a specific study should be further organized according to the following outline: 1) conclusions, briefly stated, followed by 2) a statement of the problem and background information, 3) a description of methods, data, and any further discussion, and 4) the notice of whom to contact for further information. Once submitted, all summaries will be considered for expansion into feature articles or for publication, basically as is.

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"Deinstitutionalization,"
A Public Policy Fashion
by Amitai Etzioni

Returning patients to the community without providing adequate care can increase their vulnerability and over-burden existing services.

Among the curses afflicting mental patients, disabled persons, children and the aged—in short, society’s weakest and most vulnerable members—are the vicissitudes of fashion in public policy. The emergence of sweeping new outlooks on long-standing and resistant social problems are the result of intricate and far from fully understood processes. Among the many factors are changes in societal values and disenchantment with existing programs and the philosophies behind them, as well as the development of new schools of thought in social science. The upshot is that once in a while there erupts a “new approach” that catches the imagination of the media, policy-makers, and many an expert, and hurriedly affects the well-being of hundreds of thousands of people and the allocation of millions of tax dollars. With little experimentation, whole agencies are disbanded, dismembered or subsumed; new bureaucracies, centers and services created; scores of laws enacted and hundreds of regulations issued. Then, a few years following a major overhaul, it is discovered that the fashionable new policy’s merits were poorly documented, its flaws unanticipated and its glamour chiefly the result of its novel contrast to the preceding battle-scarred and weary programs. Unhappily, collective amnesia seems to be at work ensuring that each new generation of policy-makers learns little from past mistakes and is as ready as the last to be lured by a new fashion’s flashy promise and untested payoff.

“Deinstitutionalization” is one of the most recent policy fashions. Its scope ranges from care for the retarded to nursing home policy to rehabilitation of juvenile delinquents, but its greatest impact has been on treatment of the mentally ill. In 1969 there were 430,000 patients in the nation’s mental hospitals; by early 1975, largely as a result of deinstitutionalization efforts, there were 130,000 fewer.

The deinstitutionalization philosophy’s strongest element is its critique of the existing system. It is quite true that many mental patients in many state mental hospitals have received more custodial than therapeutic care. And among those who did recover there was a fair number who did so without having any particular treatment administered. Moreover, institutionalization, as Erving Goffman, Thomas Szasz, Ivan Illich, and others have pointed out, is itself a major source of loss of identity and dehumanization. These and other critical observations have, in turn, been interpreted by some to mean that the sheer release of individuals from institutions would suffice to restore the patients’ lost selves. "Returning to the community" is romanticized as though the community in question were a warm, loving tribe instead of the urban slum awaiting many.

What in fact has happened when deinstitutionalization has been translated into policy is that thousands of individuals, at least initially unable to cope, have been left to fend for themselves in the streets. For many, no family was waiting, either because they had none or because they were unwanted. Communities protested the influx of disoriented, sometimes senile, sometimes exhibitionist persons, many of whom also posed a substantial new burden on the welfare rolls. When a policy of discharging a large number of mental patients was carried out in New York State, 15,000 patients were shipped to New York City alone, where, despite the state’s theoretical commitment to community facilities, only 12 small half-way houses were operating. Thousands of the released patients moved into shabby, crime-ridden welfare hotels (soon making up 25 percent of their residents) while another 5,000 ended up in nursing homes where they often were fed less, given more drugs, and abused more severely than they had been in state mental institutions. Hospitals such as Bellevue and Kings County began to experience a sharp rise in mental patients coming to them for treatment. Many patients returning, according to Bellevue’s psychiatric director, 10 and 20 times. Ironically, since the legislature’s interest in deinstitutionalization was in large measure a budget-cutting device, the cost to the public of this transfer of patients from one institution to another has often resulted in higher expenditures. Finally, public outcry about patients roaming the streets, and the expansion of unsavory welfare hotels, forced New York State to slow down its deinstitutionalization policy in April, 1974.

The answer may well not lie in reinstitutionalization (although for the short run this might be the only practical and humane approach for some individuals), but in securing viable in-community services before people are discharged en masse. This requires full recognition of the fact that many people released from institutions will, in varying
observing over time the fate of innovative programs and procedures in mental health organizations leads to a surprising discovery: many of these innovations, though seemingly worthwhile, actually die out after an initial period of success. **Durability** of change often is a problem, even when an innovation addresses some real, continuing need and when no clearly preferable alternative way to meet that need has emerged.

The Mental Health Services Development Branch of NIMH has awarded a three-year grant to Drs. Edward M. Glaser and Thomas E. Backer of the Human Interaction Research Institute to learn more about what accounts for differences in durability of innovations in mental health agencies. With the new insights it is hoped this research will produce, they also plan to devise more effective techniques for enhancing the viability of worthwhile changes in service delivery organizations.

The study, which began in October, 1975, has two major phases. In Phase I, Glaser and Backer are making intensive site visits at a number of mental health facilities to examine what happens to innovations (both those that have truly taken root and those that have died out, or at least become seriously attenuated in operation). At each site, agency staff involved with the innovation are being interviewed. Data are being gathered about the innovation itself, about the circumstances of the implementation, and about the community environment of the facility. Their first site visits concern implementations of “Goal Attainment Scaling,” a technique developed by the Minneapolis Program Evaluation Resource Center.

In Phase II, they will develop a set of consultation strategies and techniques based in part on principles and techniques of organization development (OD) taken from the behavioral and management sciences. In addition to incorporating relevant findings from Phase I, they will conduct a study examining practices of a select group of highly expert consultants to organizations. Next they will host a conference of consultants and mental health administrators to critique a tentative best-practice model for providing OD consultation to mental health organizations (with the specific aim of promoting durability of organizational change). That model then will be field-tested and evaluated in several service settings. The refined model will be presented in a package of training materials for use by consultants in mental health and related fields.

These research and development activities will lead to several publications: 1) a volume of case studies generated by the Phase I research, each written in collaboration with a staff member of the agency in which the given innovation was or is located. 2) a monograph describing overall findings of the investigation about what conditions seem to facilitate or inhibit the survival of worthwhile change. 3) a monograph reporting findings from the study of expert organizational consultants. 4) a monograph on applying OD to mental health services. and 5) a book, *Consultation for Change: Organization Development in the Human Services,* with accompanying training materials for use by consultants and program evaluators.

Glaser and Backer would welcome—and in fact greatly need to have—input from readers regarding OD and durability of change in mental health organizations or related human service facilities. Readers who know of a particularly interesting case example of sustained innovation in such an organization, or who know of a mental health or other human service facility where significant OD-type consultation has been provided are invited to write to:

**Thomas E. Backer, Ph.D.**
**Human Interaction Research Institute**
**10889 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 1120**
**Los Angeles, CA 90024**

For those interested in learning more about the program of research, a brief brochure will be sent out on request.