

The President's Message

My purpose here is to raise questions that must be considered if my position that forensic psychiatry is a professional specialty is to be given serious consideration: that it is a subspecialty of psychiatry, which requires special education and training and merits specialty recognition. We should be prepared to answer such questions as "When does a special field of interest become a specialty"? "When is an area of special study and professional work considered a specialty"? "How distinctive must the area or field be to merit the label of specialty"? and finally, "How do these questions relate to forensic psychiatry"?

"Is forensic psychiatry a special area of interest available to general psychiatry"? "Or is special additional study required"? "Is special knowledge necessary"? "Are special skills necessary for its practice"? "If special knowledge and skill are necessary, can these be obtained and adequately developed through informal exposure and experience"? "Or does their acquisition require formal education and training"? "If the latter, can they, or should they, be taught during the formal psychiatric residency training program"? "Or is a special period of education and training necessary in order to develop the requisite expertise"?

For me, these questions are answered in this way. If the professional work of forensic psychiatry is sufficiently different from the rest of psychiatry, if forensic psychiatry is so distinctive an area (of psychiatry) that its content and boundaries can clearly be set out, then the concept of subspecialty should be considered. Furthermore, if information, knowledge and understanding that are not customarily a part of general psychiatry are required, and if special skills that are not ordinarily shared with the general psychiatric practitioner are demanded, then the concept of a subspecialty becomes stronger and more viable.

I believe that forensic psychiatry satisfies all of these qualifications and is properly a subspecialty of psychiatry. I also believe that special education and training in forensic psychiatry beyond the formal residency training program are necessary in order to upgrade the field. Further, I believe that specialty status must be provided to accredited practitioners. Such accreditation is necessary in order to set standards for the field, attract the more qualified candidate, and assure him of professional recognition of his expertise. And finally, I believe that special education and training in forensic psychiatry go to the heart of the concept of specialty, that is, that this professional field be distinguished by the quality of excellence.

This quality of excellence characterizes the professional concept of specialty and distinguishes it from the legal concept of expertise. The legal definition of experts carries a minimum qualification, that the expert witness demonstrate his competency in relevant matters that are outside the common knowledge and experience of the average layman juror and judge. Excellence is not required. The forensic psychiatrist, *qua* expert, does not require specialty status: but, in my opinion, he does need special education and training in order to attain the quality of expertise that marks the professional specialist. I hope that all of us who have attained our present measure of expertise by informal exposure and experience recognize the pressing need for such additional formal special education and training in forensic psychiatry for the future of our field as a specialty.

With these questions in mind, we should ask, "How can the specialty of forensic

psychiatry be identified”? “What are its distinctive characteristics”? “What should be the context of this special education”? “In what skills should the forensic psychiatrist be trained”? “Where and how can he best be educated and trained”?

I have defined forensic psychiatry as an interface discipline, one in which we apply our psychiatric theories, concepts, principles and practice to legal issues for legal ends. I have outlined principles of forensic psychiatry in an effort to present guidelines for psychiatric-legal opinion-making. These (definitions and principles) sharply differentiate the field of forensic psychiatry from the rest of psychiatry, define its boundaries, and provide a foundation for specialty interface education and training.

In the following article I describe the content of the special interface of education and training in forensic psychiatry that, in my opinion, is the basis of our expertise.