

The President's Message

This special edition of the Bulletin of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law contains papers from the recent Butler Hospital Isaac Ray Symposium. They address contemporary issues significantly relating psychiatry to law. The American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law is pleased to bring them to professional and public attention through its Bulletin.

Isaac Ray also would have been pleased with these papers. One hundred and thirty years ago, he helped found the Association of Medical Superintendents of American Institutions for the Insane (later to become the American Psychiatric Association) and helped build the Butler Hospital in Providence, Rhode Island, where this Symposium was held. Here Ray served as superintendent for 22 years, from 1845 to 1867. His original contribution to forensic psychiatry seven years before he moved to Butler Hospital had already marked him as the pioneer in this field.

Following in this tradition, the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law is indebted to Isaac Ray in that the Academy is a part of organized medicine, a branch of psychiatry. It is a medical organization, not a medical-legal one, although its goal is that of relating our professional field to legal issues.

The objectives of the Academy further those expressed by Ray in the Preface to his *Treatise on the Medical Jurisprudence of Insanity* (1838): "[To explore and define the] legal relations of the [mentally ill] in order to improve the [regulation] of their personal and social rights by enlightened principles of jurisprudence."

I would like to list the purposes of AAPL as outlined in the By-Laws of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law:

- 1) To exchange ideas and experience among forensic psychiatrists in North America.
- 2) To elevate the standards of study and practice in this field.
- 3) To develop training programs for psychiatrists desirous of acquiring skills in forensic psychiatry.
- 4) To take leadership in initiating and monitoring research in the field.
- 5) To improve relationships between psychiatrists, attorneys, legislators, jurists and penologists.
- 6) To take leadership in informing the public of the needs of those involved with the law and the contributions available from psychiatry.

Ray was interested in influencing the laws pertinent to insanity and was disappointed that he had exerted so little influence on such laws during his lifetime. Today, through the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law, psychiatrists have the opportunity to exert such influence.

Interest in psychiatry and law has burgeoned during the past thirty years. No special field challenges the whole area of American psychiatry more than that of psychiatry and law. The interface of psychiatry and law has provoked concern among psychiatrists of all persuasions and schools of thought. Psychiatrists in hospitals have become intensely concerned about the impact of mental health law. Those in private practice are concerned about psychiatric-legal issues ranging from confidentiality and privilege to the identification of psychic injury in Workmen's Compensation issues. And psychiatrists involved with traditional criminal and quasi-criminal issues such as mental competence to stand

trial, the insanity defense, and juvenile delinquency commitments have continued to express their professional anxiety and concern.

The practicing psychiatrist, as well as the academician, has become concerned about the impact of law upon psychiatry and the impact of psychiatry upon social-legal issues. He has become concerned about the need to increase his appreciation of the relationship between psychiatry and law and about the need to improve his skills in making professional contributions to this interface. The American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law developed in response to this concern.

Founded in 1969, the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law is a national psychiatric organization, now including approximately 350 psychiatrists who hold significant interest and involvement in psychiatry and law. Membership in AAPL is limited to psychiatrists holding membership in the American Psychiatric Association or in similar national organizations in other countries. Annual and semi-annual meetings provide the forum for expression of the Academy objectives; and the Bulletin, as AAPL's journal, serves to disseminate our contributions, and those of others, in psychiatry and law.

Isaac Ray was the most influential writer on forensic psychiatry in the nineteenth century. I believe that he would have seen in the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law a fruition of his work, his goals, and his dreams. American psychiatrists in this last quarter of the twentieth century are invited to pursue the challenge of psychiatry and law.