

# Robert I. Simon, MD: Of Psychiatry, Law, and Books

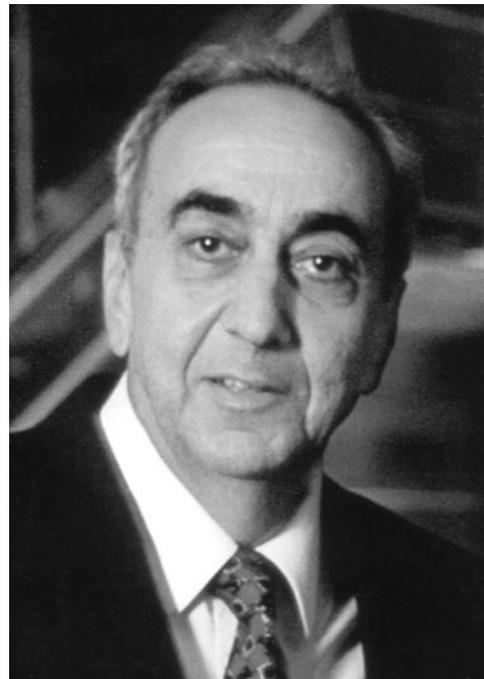
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Dr. Robert I. Simon, this year's President of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law (AAPL), is an exceptional psychiatrist, teacher, and colleague. His contributions have earned him the most prestigious awards in the field of forensic psychiatry. In perhaps the ultimate acknowledgment of his erudition, the Supreme Court cited one of his books, *Clinical Psychiatry and the Law* (1987), in the landmark case of *Washington v. Harper* (494 U.S. 210 (1990)). His humility and self-deprecating sense of humor disguise one of the most gifted and accomplished forensic psychiatrists ever to hold the office of President of our Academy.

Dr. Simon's career has been devoted to using the principles of forensic psychiatry to educate clinicians, in the interest of improving their clinical practices and the treatment they provide to their patients. In doing so, he has championed and advanced the ethical practice of psychiatry, made invaluable contributions to the academic literature of forensic and clinical psychiatry, and established a reputation for literary, intellectual, and academic excellence. His own clinical foundation is the basis of his work. He is a master of psychodynamic theory, which he uses to understand and elucidate both clinical and forensic problems.

Dr. Simon's many accomplishments in the field of forensic psychiatry more than merit his holding the



Robert I. Simon, MD

highest office in AAPL. He is the winner of two Manfred S. Guttmacher Awards (of the American Psychiatric Association (APA and AAPL)) for his outstanding contribution to the literature on forensic psychiatry. The most recent of these was in 2005 for his book *Assessing Suicide Risk: Guidelines for Clinically Based Risk Management* (2004). He has also been awarded the 2003 Isaac Ray Award (of the APA and AAPL) for his outstanding contribution to forensic psychiatry and the psychiatric aspects of jurisprudence; the 1995 Golden Apple Award (of AAPL) for his significant contributions to the field of foren-

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sisic psychiatry; and the 1994 Seymour Pollack Award (of the APA and AAPL) in recognition of his distinguished contributions to the teaching and educational functions of forensic psychiatry.

In his book *Clinical Psychiatry and the Law*, Dr. Simon quoted the epigraphs:

And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.  
(John 8:32)

With purity and with holiness I will pass my life and practice my art. (The Oath of Hippocrates)

These summarize the guiding values of Dr. Simon's work and life: to increase knowledge and to promote the ethical practice of clinical and forensic psychiatry. Dr. Simon has dedicated himself to educating forensic and general psychiatrists in the ethical and forensic practice of psychiatry through teaching, mentoring, and writing. As Clinical Professor of Psychiatry and Director of the Program in Psychiatry and Law at Georgetown University School of Medicine in Washington, D.C., he lectures locally, nationally, and internationally on a variety of clinical and forensic topics. He is a valued speaker and has been invited to address over 50 national and international organizations, including the Royal College of Psychiatrists in England, St. Elizabeth's Sesquicentennial (150th) Anniversary Symposium in Washington D.C., and the 16th Annual Congress of the Australian and New Zealand Association of Psychiatry and Law.

Closer to home, Dr. Simon developed the Program in Psychiatry and Law at Georgetown University Medical School in 1990. This program is dedicated to providing psychiatry residents with a basic working knowledge of forensic psychiatry. He has also been instrumental in establishing the first forensic psychiatry fellowship program in Washington D.C., coordinated by St. Elizabeth's Hospital, the Georgetown University Medical Center Department of Psychiatry, and the District of Columbia, with the hope that the first fellows will be admitted this year.

In addition to formal teaching, Dr. Simon epitomizes the ideal mentor. Many members of AAPL have benefited from his generosity of spirit. His warmth, intellect, and keen sense of humor have resulted in prized and mutually satisfying mentoring relationships. He freely gives his most valuable resources, his time and experience, to those who seek him out. He goes out of his way to open doors to forensic practice and publishing opportunities. He consistently makes himself available to answer ques-

tions, discuss ideas, give advice or direction, provide references for difficult problems or cases, review or edit articles in preparation for publication, and lend an empathetic ear to those struggling to master the complexities of forensic psychiatry.

One of the authors has personal experience with Dr. Simon's commitment to mentoring and teaching by personal example. Dr. Gold first heard of Dr. Simon in 1994, when they were retained by opposing sides in Dr. Gold's first forensic case. As a result of this case, she became interested in forensic psychiatry. She began to contact local forensic psychiatrists to see how she could begin a forensic practice. A number of people suggested that she call Dr. Simon, but she was hesitant to do so. Certainly, so eminent a forensic psychiatrist would not have time for an inexperienced newcomer.

Dr. Gold eventually decided to call Dr. Simon and leave a message. Surprisingly, in this age of voice mail, Dr. Simon answered his own phone, catching her off guard. She nervously identified herself. Dr. Simon remembered her from the case a few years earlier, which she felt could not be a good sign. Nevertheless, she managed to stammer, "Dr. Simon, I want to be a forensic psychiatrist. How do I do it?" Contrary to Dr. Gold's expectation of being dismissed as a pesky novice seeking advice or as a one-time adversary, Dr. Simon greeted her as a colleague, generously invited her to join a forensic study group that he had organized, and offered to discuss how to go about establishing a forensic practice. Dr. Gold was not consciously aware that she was seeking a mentor. In his wisdom, however, Dr. Simon not only recognized what she was looking for but also volunteered for the job!

It is with great personal and professional pleasure that all who come to know this side of Dr. Simon learn that his response to Dr. Gold's call is typical. He demonstrates extraordinary generosity toward all psychiatrists interested in learning about and practicing forensic psychiatry. His satisfaction and pleasure in the success of others are obvious and genuine. He is a willing and active collaborator in presentations and projects and even in writing books and articles. Although he could produce all these on his own, he takes great pleasure in his collaborative relationships and acknowledges how much he himself benefits from the mutual enrichment and growth these relationships provide. The value of these collaborations to the rest of us cannot be overstated.

Indeed, part of the value in his teaching and mentoring lies in his willingness to use his own experiences as a way of instructing others in how to succeed or avoid the pitfalls inherent in the practice of forensic psychiatry. In the process of continually looking for ways to improve himself, Dr. Simon analyzes in personal conversation and academic discussions his perceived errors (most of which would go unnoticed if he were not to point them out). In characteristic displays of humility, Dr. Simon often teaches by personal example. He frequently urges others to reflect on their own blind spots and biases by discussing his own. In one of his writing workshops, his description of his own anxieties and concerns relative to his books was so personally revealing that one attendee remarked, "I feel as though I just walked into the middle of someone's analysis!"

On another occasion, Dr. Simon related his experience of being invited to an ex-patient's wedding as a way of teaching about boundaries. After much reflection and consideration of the pros and cons of the matter, he decided to attend. All went well until he found himself in the receiving line after the ceremony and realized he was expected, like all the male guests, to kiss the bride, his ex-patient. He managed this with aplomb, but recognized that this experience presented a valuable lesson on the capacity of ambiguous boundary situations to take unexpected turns.

Some of the most valuable of Dr. Simon's experiences involve the practical aspects of forensic psychiatry. His decades of practice operating at the interface of psychiatry and the law have resulted in a wealth of experience in negotiating some of the most difficult situations in clinical and forensic psychiatry. For example, he repeatedly reminds both new and experienced practitioners to avoid being seduced by one side or the other in partisan forensic situations, because, as he so succinctly states, "You have no friends in litigation. If you want a friend, get a dog."

Of all Dr. Simon's professional activities, the passion of his professional life is writing. For him, writing is like breathing: it is an essential life function. Time for writing is a protected part of his every day. When his children were small, they would not dream of opening the door to his home office when he was writing. They knew that nothing but a major catastrophe would be allowed to interrupt his writing time. (All minor catastrophes were by mutual agreement the responsibility of his wife.)

Dr. Robert Sadoff has described Dr. Simon as "one of psychiatry's most gifted writers." Dr. Simon's writing is characterized by creativity and insight. He teaches the technically complex aspects of forensic psychiatry while reinforcing and reminding his audience of the basic principles and aspects of practice. No other author has contributed to the depth and breadth of the literature of forensic psychiatry as has Robert Simon.

Dr. Simon is the author, at last count, of 93 articles and 47 book chapters (if you just blinked, these numbers have risen). Since 1999 alone, he has contributed chapters on forensic subjects to several seminal texts, spanning psychiatric subspecialties, including consultation-liaison psychiatry, clinical psychiatry, and administrative psychiatry.

Most impressively, he has edited or written 12 separate publications on forensic psychiatry. His most recent book, *Assessing and Managing Suicide Risk: Guidelines for Clinically-based Risk Management* (2004), as noted, won the 2005 Guttmacher Award, as did an earlier work, *Psychiatric Malpractice: Cases and Comments for Clinicians* (coauthored with Dr. Sadoff, 1992). His innovative books, *The Retrospective Assessment of Mental States in Litigation: Predicting the Past* (co-edited with Daniel W. Shuman, JD, 2002) and the second edition of *Clinical Psychiatry and the Law* (1992), received honorable mention for this same award.

Dr. Simon's work has offered unique perspectives on some of the most complex forensic and clinical issues. He has most recently edited *The American Psychiatric Publishing Textbook of Suicide Assessment and Management* (co-edited by Robert E. Hales, 2006). In 2004, along with writing his book, *Assessing and Managing Suicide Risk: Guidelines for Clinically-based Risk Management*, Dr. Simon edited the *American Psychiatric Publishing Textbook of Forensic Psychiatry* (co-edited with Dr. Gold, 2004). This is the first comprehensive textbook of forensic psychiatry directed toward both the general clinician and experienced forensic practitioners, and a second edition of this work is scheduled for publication in 2009. In 2003, he published a second and updated edition of his groundbreaking work, *Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in Litigation: Guidelines for Forensic Assessment* (2003), a controversial and difficult subject with which forensic psychiatrists and the legal system often struggle.

## Biography

His book, *Bad Men Do What Good Men Dream: A Forensic Psychiatrist Illuminates the Darker Side of Human Behavior* (American Psychiatric Press, 1996), offers insight into some of the most complicated aspects of human behavior. Masterfully written, this fascinating text explores and explains a spectrum of clinical and forensic experience without sensationalizing. A book review published in the *American Journal of Psychiatry* described it as “riveting” (*Am J Psych* 157:1531–2, 2000). It is the first book of the forensic genre intended for informed laypersons as well as professionals. Its success and popularity are demonstrated by its publication in paperback (1999) and its translation into Italian (1997), Japanese (1997), and Chinese (1999).

Other invaluable texts by Dr. Simon include *Mastering Forensic Psychiatric Practice: Advanced Strategies for the Expert Witness* (co-authored with Dr. Gutheil, American Psychiatric Press, Inc., 2002); *The Mental Health Professional and the Law: A Comprehensive Handbook* (co-edited with Lawrence A Lifson, MD, Harvard University Press, 1998); *The Concise Guide to Psychiatry and Law for Clinicians*, 3rd edition (American Psychiatric Press, Inc., 2001); *The American Psychiatric Press Review of Clinical Psychiatry and the Law*, volumes 1, 2, and 3 (American Psychiatric Press, 1990–1992); and *Psychiatric Interventions and Malpractice: A Primer for Liability Prevention* (Charles C Thomas, 1982).

Not one to rest on his laurels, Dr. Simon has other works in progress. These include a collaboration with Daniel W. Shuman, JD, in writing *The Clinical Manual of Psychiatry and the Law* (publication scheduled for 2007) and with Dr. Gutheil in writing *Practical Forensic Psychiatry: The Expert Witness at Work* (publication scheduled for 2008). Dr. Simon himself states that he is “always writing.” In whatever activity he may be engaged, a part of his mind is considering the written word. As he describes it, the process of writing is really one of transposing what he has already written on paper. This is literally true. Dr. Simon’s prodigious writing accomplishments are even more impressive when one considers that he has only recently come to terms with modern technology. Despite advancing quickly on the technological learning curve, he still prefers utilizing a pen when he writes.

He also is committed to sharing his love of writing. In addition to contributing his own articles for publication, he supports and assists others in publishing

by contributing his time and expertise to peer review and editing. On more than one occasion, he has run workshops for forensic practitioners at AAPL and elsewhere on writing. Even to sit down next to him is to be flint to his steel. He has the unusual capacity to strike sparks of inspiration in others. Many a casual remark from him will lead to creative responses in colleagues, as both authors of this biography have had cause to know and appreciate.

He often says, “Character is destiny.” If that is the case, it is clear why he has become AAPL’s new president. It is not his accomplishments alone that have earned him well-deserved professional recognition. Dr. Simon’s exemplary character and his personal achievement of the ideals of ethical practice are equally impressive. He wrote in *Clinical Psychiatry and the Law*, “At the highest level, the clinician must understand the overriding truth that professional concern for the patient is the fundamental law.” He has dedicated himself and encouraged and taught others to be mindful of the ethics of the practice of forensic and clinical psychiatry.

Moreover, Dr. Simon’s career in psychiatry, the law, and the making of books has provided a role model that demonstrates how to be an ethical practitioner of the clinical science and art that is psychiatry. As forensic psychiatrists are all aware, our discipline is one that offers more than the usual number of opportunities to cross ethical and moral boundaries. A longtime colleague summed up Dr. Simon’s ability to encompass the ideals of ethical practice. Whenever the colleague faces a difficult decision, he asks himself, “What would Bob Simon do?” No matter what the question, the answer is always, “Take the high road.” Dr. Simon’s character and career have demonstrated that this is an ideal that can be attained.

Dr. Simon began his distinguished career as an undergraduate at the University of Connecticut (whose basketball team he still follows avidly), receiving his BA with honors in 1956. He received his MD from Tufts University School of Medicine in 1960. He completed his internship at Brooke General Hospital in Fort Sam Houston, Texas, in 1961, and his residency in psychiatry at the Jackson Memorial Hospital and University of Miami School of Medicine in 1966. He met his wife Pat, a psychiatric nurse, in Florida, beginning their lifelong partnership.

Dr. Simon’s wife, their three sons, and three grandsons (a fourth grandchild is on the way) are also a testimonial to Dr. Simon’s character and values. Anyone who knows Dr. Simon comes to know Pat

Simon, because they are without question a team. They have been married for 37 years, although who (if either) is in charge is open to debate: each refers to the other lovingly as “the boss.” Their relationship has been the cornerstone of Dr. Simon’s career. As he puts it, “Pat is the heart and soul of my achievements.” Pat Simon speaks freely of her husband’s professional and personal generosity and of his devotion to his family. She describes him as someone who is much more focused on giving to others than on gaining for himself. However, this is as true about her as it is about him. He is the first to say that any recognition of his accomplishments is also recognition of her dedicated support of his work.

Dr. Simon, quoting from Ecclesiastes in one of his published works noted, “Of making many books there is no end.” His career has been devoted to using the principles of forensic psychiatry to educate clinicians in the interest of improving their clinical practice and the treatment they provide to their patients through example and written word. In doing so, he has committed himself to advancing the ethical practice of forensic and general psychiatry, contributed to the academic literature of forensic psychiatry, and established a reputation for literary, intellectual, and academic excellence. We therefore hope that to the making of Dr. Robert Simon’s books, there is indeed no end.