

# **Seymour Pollack and the American Board of Forensic Psychiatry**

Jonas R. Rappeport MD, and Abraham L. Halpern, MD

Those who knew Seymour Pollack knew that he stood for excellence in whatever he did and that he expected it from others. He was constantly concerned about the competence of those who participated in both teaching forensic psychiatry and testifying in court. Seymour was one of the original ten who participated in discussions which led to the creation of AAPL in 1979. He repeatedly expressed interest in the establishment of some criteria for certifying competence in our field. When AAPL was started, there was lengthy discussion about the possibility of having a separate membership status of Fellow of AAPL for those who met the criteria of many years of experience and, as far as Seymour was concerned, a standard of "excellence" that was to be determined. He suggested examination as a means of qualifying to become a FAAPL because it was believed that AAPL could best carry out its educational goals by maintaining a level of democracy. This concept was rejected because it was feared, understandably, that an elitist image might impede recruitment.

Of course, Seymour did not give up easily in his desire to see that there be some method by which specific expertise could be validated. At every meeting of the AAPL Executive Committee, Seymour would speak about the need to adopt standards in order to indicate those who might be more expert than the regular membership. Jonas Rappeport recalls arguing strongly with Seymour on many occasions that this would only be devisive to AAPL and was not the goal of AAPL. That is, AAPL was not a certifying or qualifying organization but an educational one, whose goal was to educate all psychiatrists in forensic psychiatry. Then in early 1976, a serendipitous event happened. Maier Tuchler, who at that time was president of the Forensic Sciences Foundation, contacted Bob Sadoff about the formation of an American Board of Forensic Psychiatry. Bob and Maier in turn contacted Seymour, Stan Portnow, John Torrens, Zigmond Lebensonn, Jonas Rappeport, Bernard Diamond, Irwin Perr, and Walter Bromberg.

Maier informed the group that the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (the predecessor to the National Institute of Justice) had given a grant to the Forensic Sciences Foundation to establish boards to certify expertise in several different forensic areas. These included forensic odon-

---

Dr. Rappeport is executive director and a past president. Dr. Halpern is the current president of the American Board of Forensic Psychiatry.

tology, forensic anthropology, forensic document examiners, forensic laboratory chemists, forensic pathologists, and forensic psychiatrists. There was apparently some need to move with dispatch, as the boards were required to be incorporated before July 1, 1976. The grant included funds to incorporate the board, as well as the assistance of an executive director to help the board become established and render its first examinations. Subsequently, it was hoped that the American Academy of Forensic Sciences, the parent body of the Forensic Sciences Foundation, would continue to offer organizational services to the various boards.

The phone calls and arguments began. The debate was hot and heavy between many of us as to whether or not we should become involved in such an organization. Seymour's feeling was that this was a job for AAPL to do, while Jonas Rappeport, who had previously been opposed to any type of board certification, stated that he recognized this as an excellent opportunity to establish a certification program without the involvement of AAPL and strongly supported it. At the May 1976 AAPL Executive Committee meeting, there was a long and, at times vehement, discussion by the entire Executive Committee. The final decision was that AAPL would lend its support for the establishment of such a board and would consider becoming one of the sponsoring organizations along with the American Academy of Forensic Sciences. With this approval, the incorporators of the board met in Washington in June 1976 and reviewed the final articles of incorporation and bylaws and signed the corporate papers and thus the American Board of Forensic Psychiatry was established.

In his detailed and analytic manner, Seymour was of tremendous help in ironing out the issues that always come up with the formation of an organization. It was of course immediately agreed that there would be no grandfathering, and since there would be none, the board would have to examine itself. Seymour took the responsibility of chairing the first examinations committee for the development of our first examination, with the assistance of Bernard Diamond and Walter Bromberg. It was agreed that each board member would furnish 20 questions and that Seymour would compile these into a 200-question examination to then be completed in private by each of the examiners, and that we would then get together at the next AAPL meeting (October 1976) and go over the answers and use the ensuing arguments about the answers as an oral examination. This process was then repeated two more times by the May 1978 meeting of the APA. The examinations committee was changed twice in order to prevent undue influence by any one group. Of the last test in April 1978, Seymour wrote "... about one third of these questions have different answers in my opinion." By this time, Seymour had accepted responsibility to develop the syllabus to be sent to candidates. He did such a thorough job that he almost

produced a monograph. The directors asked him to reduce the details, which he willingly did, with the help of Stan Portnow. By this time, the Board had established an application blank and a brochure and was prepared to render its first written examination at the fall AAPL meetings in Montreal in October 1978. The examination was by then honed to 150 questions, some true-false, others multiple choice, and a series of essay questions. Subsequently, those who passed that examination sat for an oral examination that was given in Los Angeles in February 1979. At that time, the directors of the Board awarded themselves certificates and their names were announced along with this first group of diplomates. Seymour Pollack was awarded certificate 6, the first certificates having been allocated to the directors in alphabetical order.

As the Board grew, Seymour remained a guiding light. He was an active examiner for all of the oral examinations. He participated in the Board's discussions with his usual thorough and comprehensive approach and continually encouraged the maintenance of the high standards with which the board had begun. Anyone who has participated in trying to establish standards as has the Board knows that this is very difficult, in that each individual may have his own interpretation of what constitutes competence or excellence. There was always an argument as to the difference between competence and excellence, and Seymour functioned as one of the major balancing forces within the board, lest we go too far in demanding excellence or not far enough in setting a standard for competence. He may have seemed perfectionistic, but we on the Board know he was not our toughest examiner.

He will always be remembered, not only for what he taught all of us about forensic psychiatry, but for what he taught us about determination, perseverance, and personal integrity.