

MENTAL GROUP WORK

Suggestions By Dr W. Ironside

The economics of mental health and disease suggested that it was far more effective to employ specialists from a variety of professions than to build institutions. the senior lecturer in psychiatry at the University of Otago (Dr. W. Ironside) told a public meeting in Christchurch last evening. More than 150 persons attended the meeting for the purpose of forming a Mental Health Association in Canterbury.

"The overall cost is less and a higher level of health is achieved," Dr. Ironside said. "An association for mental health would do a great service if it could persuade those who control the expenditure of public funds to give the closest attention to this concept."

Dr. Ironside referred to the unsuccessful attempts that had been made in the last 30 years to start an association for mental health in New Zealand. The present growing interest of the public in mental health might mean that at last an association would be successfully formed. In Auckland and Dunedin efforts were now being made to form associations.

Although there had not been a comprehensive investigation of psychological illness in New Zealand there was nothing to suggest it differed from countries such as England or the United States. At any given time approximately 30 per cent. of those who were ill suffered from diseases with psychological causes.

So much had to be learned about the causes that effective measures of prevention were as yet few, he said.

There was a great deal of agreement about the harmful effects on young children of prolonged separation from maternal care and of continuous hostile tensions in the family.

The development of the personality could be warped and proneness to psychological illness ensued. An association could encourage the application of proven ways and means of preventing these causes of mental ill health.

Some Tasks

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PRESS, VOLUME XCVII, ISSUE
28572, 29 APRIL 1958, PAGE 7

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Acknowledgements

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Dr. Ironside enumerated some tasks an association could undertake. A permanent panel of lecturers should be available for other organisations interested in mental health to call upon. For groups who wanted their mental health problems clarified and instruction in methods of dealing with the problems, a panel of expert counsellors could be set up. Films with audience participation were a useful means of public education and fostering good relationships with the press so as to disseminate news of progress in mental health techniques.

Many professional and non-professional societies could have an influence on the mental health of the community, Dr. Ironside said. "An association, without losing its autonomy, would try to develop those ties with these," he said.

The study of problems could lead to the publication of short, authoritative reports.

Dr. Ironside said he believed that certain features of New Zealand laws in relation to psychological disorder should be studied to determine how effective they were and how appropriate to contemporary knowledge of psychology of health and disease.

Discussing the treatment of mental disorder, Dr. Ironside said progress in the treatment of the severely, chronically ill who occupied the greater proportion of mental hospital beds had led to what might be a major breakthrough in dealing with what had seemed an insoluble problem. From France, the United States and Britain had come exciting reports of reductions in occupied mental hospital beds.

"In New Zealand, children suffering from psychiatric illness require far more extensive medical care than is available. Child psychiatry is an almost unknown specialty in the Dominion," Dr Ironside said.