

Psychiatry at Johns Hopkins Hospital

by

Lee Crandall Park, M.D.

Johns Hopkins University opened in 1876, Johns Hopkins Hospital opened in 1889, and the School of Medicine opened in 1893. The first Superintendent of Johns Hopkins Hospital was Henry M. Hurd, M.D., for whom Hurd Hall was named. He began his career as a general practitioner and subsequently became the first Superintendent of Eastern Michigan Asylum in Pontiac. He was also Professor of Psychiatry at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine and continued to write in his field, including a four-volume history of U.S and Canadian mental hospitals.

Henry Phipps, a trustee of Johns Hopkins Hospital, contributed funds for the construction of the Henry Phipps Psychiatric Clinic. When completed in 1913 it was the third such university facility in the United States. Adolf Meyer, M.D., was Professor of Psychiatry and Director of the Clinic. Meyer, originally a native of Zurich, Switzerland, and a pathologist, had been the Director of the Pathological Institute of the New York State Hospitals for the Insane and a faculty member at Cornell.

Adolf Meyer, the father of modern American psychiatry, was a revolutionary force in theory and in practice. He took the initiative in shifting the view of mental illness as a chronic disease requiring custodial care, to a powerfully dynamic view that each mentally ill individual became ill in a particular and personal life context that must be understood in order to effect improvement and cure. He required his residents to write up a complete life and medical history for each patient and to present it to the faculty and other residents for discussion before constructing formal theories, treatment plans and conclusions. He coined the term “psychobiology” which emphasized his belief that mind and body were integrated, each dynamically influencing the other. He also continued his neuroanatomical research. Meyer was a Founding Member of the American Psychoanalytical Association at an organizational meeting in Baltimore in May, 1911. He moved psychiatry toward the mainstream of medical education, initiated psychiatric social service, and introduced concepts about mental hygiene (another term he coined) and psychiatric nursing. (His wife was one of the first psychiatric social workers.) He published prolifically, and his ideas and his facilities brought psychiatry at Johns Hopkins to world renown. At one time, residents who had trained under him held about 10% of the faculty positions in psychiatry in the United States.

Other pioneers who began their work at Johns Hopkins during the era of Adolf Meyer included Leo Kanner in Child Psychiatry, W. Horsley Gantt at the Pavlovian Laboratory, and J.B. Watson and Curt Richter in Behaviorism and Psychobiology.

In 1982, the actualization of Meyer’s vision for the integration of studies of mind and brain was realized when the department of Psychiatry moved into a newly constructed building designed to be a home for Psychiatry, Neurology, Neurosurgery, and Neuroscience. The building is appropriately named the Adolf Meyer Center.

As can be seen, Johns Hopkins was establishing a tradition of finding psychiatry directors who had received prior education in fields other than or in addition to psychiatry. This continued with John C. Whitehorn, the successor to Adolf Meyer after his retirement in 1941. Whitehorn, who had been trained in chemistry and biology, came to Johns Hopkins from his position as Chairman of Psychiatry at Washington University in St. Louis. Earlier, he had been at McLean Hospital, where he had gradually discovered that exploring the minds of patients provided much more pertinent information about mental illness than he could learn from their chemistries. At Johns Hopkins he continued the tradition of studying the patient in the context of his/her personal life situation, with a special focus on the psychiatric interview and on empathy. He conducted clinical research with Barbara Betz on the significance of personality characteristics of therapists in the successful treatment of schizophrenic patients. Some significant members of his staff included Jerome D. Frank, an innovator of controlled studies of psychotherapy for outpatients, and Eugene Meyer, who directed the psychosomatic/psychiatric liaison program of the hospital. John Whitehorn, as well as Adolf Meyer and Henry Hurd, were presidents of the American Psychiatric Association. After the retirement of Whitehorn, Frank was acting head of the department for a period of time. Seymour S. Kety, a prominent physiologist and neuroscientist, directed the department briefly until he left for Harvard.

Subsequently the Chairman was Joel Elkes, whose specialty was psychopharmacological research, and who initiated the change in the name of the department to Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences. Elkes brought Solomon H. Snyder to Johns Hopkins, where he continues to pursue a superb research career.

In 1975, Paul R. McHugh, a psychiatrist and neurologist, began his distinguished career as Chairman of the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences. He received his medical degree from Harvard and his training at Harvard and Maudsley Hospital in London. He came to Johns Hopkins from his position as Chairman of Psychiatry at the University of Oregon. Under McHugh the department has pursued multiple research interests, including motivated behaviors, neuropsychiatry, alcoholism, schizophrenia, mood disorders, community psychiatry and psychiatric education. He is the author, with Phillip R. Slavney, of a highly respected textbook of psychiatry. Clinical and research endeavors have been outstanding, recognized not only in psychiatric circles but in the larger professional and public world. For example, since U.S. News and World Report began the annual ranking of "America's Best Hospitals" in 1990, the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences has been ranked in the top group of psychiatry departments every year. A considerable number of residents and staff who trained and worked under McHugh now hold positions of prominence, including chairmanships, in other universities. *Lex Burke Smith, M.D. contributed to this article.*

Published in The Maryland Psychiatric Society: Celebrating 50 Years, pp 36, 42, Maryland Psychiatric Society, Baltimore, 2000.