The Role of Psychiatric Nursing in an Open Setting

“Nursing is the protection, promotion, and optimization of health and abilities, prevention of illness and injury, facilitation of healing, alleviation of suffering through the diagnosis and treatment of human response, and advocacy in the care of individuals, families, groups, communities, and populations.” This is the definition offered by the American Nursing Association. If you read it again, the magnitude of the role is apparent. Nursing at Riggs is all of these things and maybe a bit more.

At the Austen Riggs Center, psychiatric nurses treat human responses to physical and mental health events and come from a position of hope for potential change, so that all of their patients may see the possibility of managing the life that they want. Nurses always meet patients where they currently are, right at that moment, validating their feelings and encouraging them to put those feelings into words, perhaps after a difficult family meeting, or in their efforts to take up their role and find their authority in Riggs’ therapeutic community.

Not only are nurses available to patients 24/7, but they also work alongside patients and serve an important role as part of a patient’s interdisciplinary treatment team, providing input on the context of daily living. They see how patients connect with other patients and staff and observe how they engage within the community. Often, in a quieter and less structured way, nurses have the time to reflect with their patients on behavior or perceived obstacles. Patients’ behavior can be linked to their past within their family of origin. Nurses think with patients on how their responses may be connected to an earlier time in their life that was troubling to them and engage patients to notice any patterns or familiar responses. Together nurses and patients explore other possible ways of responding that patients may find useful.

Nursing at Riggs is different from many other psychiatric settings – especially locked settings. Nursing connects with patients, but not just about problems. They may share books, or discuss events – communicating in a manner in which relationships are fostered and learning and community are enhanced. Sometimes, patients may get into arguments or act out in some ways. When this happens, the nursing staff is there to help. Nurses are trained to quickly assess a patient who is struggling and determine an appropriate intervention.

Director of Patient Services Jane Bloom, PhD, RN, CS, oversees the nursing staff and describes the task of nursing: “Nurses do work with patients around a lot of difficult behavior; it’s different from the role of a therapist. The therapists will make a dynamic formulation about how to place the patient’s behavior in perspective in a clinical meeting; the nurse’s thought is, ‘But I need to help the patient with these behaviors in the here and now.’ It’s the difference between a therapist understanding why the patient is behaving a certain way, and a nurse responding with, ‘What do I need to do to help maintain the patient’s safety while providing them with an opportunity to reflect on and learn about their behavior?’”

Dr. Bloom further describes the nursing task: “Educating patients about the open setting, examined living and setting limits, while providing for patients in the least restrictive environment are continued tools of our practice. We are also engaged in teaching self-care, clarifying misperceptions and expectations and maximizing strengths.”

Dr. Bloom has served 25 years at Riggs and encourages the nursing staff to incorporate a humanistic philosophy into the practice of nursing care. This philosophy balances personal identity elements, such as the need to be understood, valued and to be safe and secure with the relationship between the mind and the body. Dr. Bloom
It hardly seems possible that I have been at Riggs for six months. I continue to be humbled by the work that is done here and the commitment of the entire staff. I am grateful for the opportunity to have joined this incredible institution and have felt welcomed by the entire Riggs community.

As you will read in our cover story, nursing has long played a crucial role in the treatment of our patients. In our open setting at Riggs, nursing staff provide a unique support to our patients and inform their treatment in meaningful ways.

Training the next generation of psychoanalytic psychotherapists is a hallmark of the work done by the Erikson Institute at Riggs. In 2015, we welcomed two new psychiatry Fellows into our post-graduate Fellowship in psychoanalytic psychotherapy and psychoanalytic studies. Tyler Dodds, MD, and Heather Forouhar Graff, MD.

The Erikson Institute was busy during the fall of 2015. Violence in Relation to Gender and Sexuality was the topic explored at our annual Fall Conference, we offered the second Psychodynamic Graduate Training in Psychology conference for training directors and our partnership with Yale expanded with the second weekend of the two-year Yale-Riggs Infant and Family Mental Health Training Program.

In 2015, we had the pleasure of welcoming three Erikson Scholars: Dale Peterson, PhD, Stephen Xenakis, MD, and Rachael Rosner, PhD, who joined us at different points during the year to engage in a partnership of mutual learning.

In addition to reading about all of this activity, you will read about Meaning Matters, a new online gathering place for psychodynamic thinkers across clinical disciplines hosted by the Austen Riggs Center. We’re very excited about broadening the reach of this platform to engage professionals in conversation and hope you will take some time to visit and engage with others at www.meaningmatterscommunity.org.

I hope you enjoy this issue of the ARC News as we all welcome the hope and promise of this New Year.

Warm Regards,

Andrew J. Gerber, MD, PhD

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relates that “there is an emphasis on therapeutic relationships, which call on the nurse’s use of self, offering holistic care mediated through effective communication and relationship-based care. We encourage patients to talk and engage their affects to better understand what their behavior means and help patients translate their behavior into language. We realize that we have our own psychodynamic relationships and take into account the patient’s perspective and how he or she is unique. We attempt all the while to discern how we fit in the complementarity of projections.”

Dr. Bloom shares that this relationship-based care is receiving new attention in nursing literature and practice but has been a mainstay to the nursing philosophy at Riggs for many years. “It is somewhat fundamental to recognize that the more you know about yourself and how you react, the better you will be guiding a patient and learning about them. Like so many things at Riggs, the relationship is of primary importance.”

In the spring of 2016, Dr. Bloom will be retiring from her role. Medical Director/CEO Andrew J. Gerber, MD, PhD, describes Dr. Bloom as “having the perfect balance of knowledge, experience and pragmatic sensibility.” Whether attending a community meeting (CM) with the patients, calling on maintenance to help restore power during Hurricane Sandy, providing support for the activities staff or celebrating the Nursery School program, Dr. Bloom has worked tirelessly, and always with grace, modeling what a nurse at Austen Riggs does.

Riggs Hosts 2nd Psychodynamic Graduate Training in Psychology Conference

On October 3-4, Riggs hosted the second working conference focusing on training issues at the graduate student level. Through both large and small group formats, attendees considered ways in which they might be more proactive in supporting efforts to find a more effective and constructive interface between American Psychological Association (APA) requirements and psychodynamic clinical values. Jacqueline Remondet Wall, PhD, the new director for consultation and accreditation at APA, joined the conference to consider difficulties attendees were encountering and to offer suggestions regarding how they might more effectively utilize resources at APA and also have an impact on training and practice guidelines. Conference Director Marilyn Charles, PhD, ABPP, stated “There was an atmosphere of collegiality and mutual respect that was heartening and generative.”

Attendees focused on concerns that arise in teaching, pleased to be able to share problems and possible solutions with one another. An area of particular concern was the APA required diversity course, which resulted in a roundtable that will take place at the 2016 APA Annual Convention in Denver, CO, to further discuss challenges faced by students and educators around issues related to experiences of diversity, broadly speaking. A third conference is planned for November 2016.
Riggs Welcomes Two New Fellows in 2015

Post-doctoral clinical psychologists and psychiatrists, who have completed their residency training, may apply for a “unique training experience in a specialized form of psychoanalytic clinical work that has all but disappeared from the clinical training world,” according to Riggs Director of Training Jennifer Stevens, PhD. The full-time, four-year Fellowship in advanced psychoanalytic psychotherapy and psychoanalytic studies at the Austen Riggs Center has been accredited as a psychoanalytic training program by the Accreditation Council for Psychoanalytic Education, Inc. (ACPEinc). Psychiatrists are also eligible to apply for a two-year Fellowship in psychoanalytic psychotherapy.

This year, Riggs welcomed two psychiatrists into the Fellowship program: Tyler Dodds, MD, and Heather Forouhar Graff, MD. “Dr. Dodds and Dr. Forouhar are excellent additions to the therapy staff at Riggs. Their selection from a competitive and qualified field of applicants is a tribute to their clinical skills and their desire to study and learn the art of psychoanalytic psychotherapy. We are pleased to play a role in their development as psychiatrists,” remarked Director of Psychiatric Education David F. Flynn, MD.

Tyler Dodds, MD

When he was an undergraduate student at Haverford College, Dr. Dodds imagined a career in laboratory research and began a path toward a PhD in neuroscience. Along the way, he developed an interest in clinically-oriented research and was encouraged to apply to MD/PhD programs by his advisor. During this period of transition, he read extensively about international health and Dr. Paul Farmer’s work creating greater access for more people to existing treatments, which led him to seek a career where he could help people on more of a one-to-one basis.

“I found that the parts of medicine that I enjoyed the most were talking with patients about their lives and helping them to make changes that they wanted to in their behaviors,” said Dr. Dodds.

His introduction to Riggs came while he was in medical school at the Yale School of Medicine. There, Dr. Dodds sought out a medical rotation to learn more about therapy and his advisor recommended the Elective in Psychodynamic Psychiatry at the Austen Riggs Center, so he applied and came to Riggs for eight weeks. “I loved the depth of discussion about cases … the level of attention to detail people had … the level of respect patients were given and the freedom they had,” commented Dr. Dodds.

As part of his training prior to coming to Riggs, Dr. Dodds completed psychiatry rotations in Peru and Argentina during medical school and noted the “strong culture of psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic thinking that permeated through a lot of the work they were doing.”

Now, as a first-year Fellow, Dr. Dodds is “hoping to learn how to help patients whom other psychiatrists or therapists might have a hard time helping or working with in a sustained way.” His initial interest in research remains present as well; he stated, “I enjoy doing research when a topic or question comes up that feels really important to me on the clinical level … I could certainly see myself doing some research or maybe some writing.”

Heather Forouhar Graff, MD

“I can’t really remember a time I wasn’t interested in observing and trying to understand why people did the things they did, why they thought the things they did,” said Dr. Forouhar Graff.

Dr. Forouhar first studied art (painting) as an undergraduate student at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and then became interested in the “perceptual aspects, brain mechanisms and brain processes” involved in the perception of art by individuals. This led her to study neuroscience research at the University of Chicago and then medicine at the University of Connecticut, where she had to decide between neurology and psychiatry. In the end, psychiatry was the field where Dr. Forouhar felt “there was more freedom to think.”

“I was already interested in the unconscious and modes of learning and memory and creativity, so it seemed like a natural step to be interested in studying more about not just therapy, but psychoanalytic thought.” Then, in her third year of medical school, a patient of hers to whom she mentioned her career aspirations in psychiatry to, told her “the only place worth studying, if you’re going to go into that field, is Austen Riggs.”

So, like Dr. Dodds, Dr. Forouhar took the Elective in Psychodynamic Psychiatry at Riggs and, as she explained, “As soon as I came to this [Riggs] campus, I had this feeling like this is a place I would love to be … this is a place I feel like I belong.” After the elective, she continued doing research with Riggs psychiatrist David Mintz, MD, who, she says “served as a mentor for me starting in medical school all the way through residency and was pivotal in terms of my decision to pursue psychoanalytic studies at Riggs.”

From the Fellowship, Dr. Forouhar hopes to augment her knowledge about psychoanalytic theory and history. She elaborated, stating, “There is a history that exists here … I feel like I’m learning from the people who have a connection to the history or are connected to the original thinkers or even current thinkers now … and that feels like a much deeper and more authentic experience of learning something.”

For more information about the Fellowship, or to apply, visit: www.austenriggs.org/fellowship.
An Exploration of Violence in Relation to Gender and Sexuality

More than 50 clinicians and scholars gathered at Riggs in October for the Erikson Institute’s annual Fall Conference to learn together about the psychodynamics of violence as it emerges in the context of gender and sexuality and to hear from four invited presenters.

Jessica Yakeley, MD, (who, incidentally, had a “formative experience” studying at Riggs many years ago as a medical student) spoke about the role of forensic psychotherapy in understanding violent behavior, its origins, its meaning and its treatment. She referenced studies that have demonstrated a link between individuals who experience early environmental trauma and later commit violent acts. As she stated, “Our capacity for aggression is innate, but aggressive behavior or violence occurs in response to threats that the self perceives in relation to either internal or external objects and which has its roots in early developmental trauma and disturbances in attachment.”

Ken Corbett, PhD, who sought to “write as a psychoanalyst, but write a creative nonfiction book,” brought psychoanalytic principles related to gender, hate and murder to life by presenting selected material from his soon-to-be-published book, Murder Over a Girl. The book follows the trial of an adolescent (being tried as an adult) who killed a transgender classmate and aims to develop a psychological understanding of both the victim and the accused, examining the familial and societal context of the violent behavior.

Peggy Reeves Sanday, PhD, a cultural anthropologist, asked the question “Why isn’t it changing?” about rape on college campuses, simultaneously addressing “how it is changing.” She also challenged the common western scholarship narrative of rape as “channeled by biology and not culture.” In her view, culture plays a very large role in determining whether a society is “rape-prone” or “rape free” and she used her experience of fieldwork in a matriarchal culture to explore her thesis.

Noëlle McAfee, PhD, a philosopher also engaged in psychoanalytic training, explored sexual violence as a “political crime” used to silence members of a particular society and likened the relationship of political silencing to the sexual violence occurring on college campuses in the United States. In one telling example, she spoke of a student of hers who asked students on a college campus “What steps do you take to prevent being a victim of sexual assault?” The women had numerous strategies, while the men had never given the question much thought before. Dr. McAfee spoke of how the public sphere is deformed when members of a society face “that kind of constant, pervasive ... fear of being really able to – having a right to be in public, a right to walk down the street.”
Successful First Year for Yale-Riggs Infant and Family Mental Health Training Program

The Erikson Institute for Education and Research and the Yale Child Study Center are collaborating to offer a two-year certificate program for mental health providers through the Yale-Riggs Infant and Family Mental Health Training Program. The program consists of four weekend training events that are held at the Austen Riggs Center and taught by clinicians from both institutions. The second weekend of the first year of courses took place on November 6-8. This session continued the learning from the initial training program in April and covered topics such as parent-infant observation, assessment of risk and helping parents with mentalization skills. Participants also engaged in a practical skills training workshop on the final day of the weekend, allowing them to translate the didactic work of the first two days into practice through examining verbatim case material.

The training program is co-directed by Yale Child Study Center faculty members Nancy Close, PhD, IMH-IV and Christiana Mills, LCSW, IMH-IV. Dr. Close is an educator and clinician and endorsed Infant Mental Health Mentor with the Connecticut Association of Infant Mental Health, who specializes in the assessment and treatment of children under age five and mental health consultation to preschool programs. Dr. Close teaches Yale College students and fellows-in-training at the Yale Child Study Center, and is a co-director of the Minding the Baby Program, an evidence-based home visiting program, which focuses on child and maternal health and mental health, supporting parent-child attachment and the development of the reflective function. Ms. Mills is a licensed clinical social worker and endorsed Infant Mental Health Mentor with the Connecticut Association of Infant Mental Health. Ms. Mills has fifteen years of experience working with young children and their families at the Yale Child Study Center, where she was trained and later became a member of the clinical faculty. Fourteen clinicians received certificates of completion for the first year of the training, which was focused on infant development, assessment of risk and parent-infant observation techniques. In year two of the program, courses will focus on the parent-infant dyad as part of a system: a family system, social system and a caregiving system.
Learning Together Across Disciplines

Learning often occurs when what we know (or don’t know) is presented with new or compelling information. Likewise, we can be agents of learning when we share what we know with others. The openness of this exchange is central to the Erikson Scholar Program, an endowed scholar-in-residence opportunity for mental health professionals, academicians in the fields of anthropology, history, law, literary criticism, political science, sociology and other relevant disciplines.

Offered through the Erikson Institute for Education and Research of the Austen Riggs Center, the Erikson Scholar Program exists at the intersection of interdisciplinary academic inquiry and the psychodynamic clinical work at Riggs. It is here where a mutual desire to study the individual in context creates a vibrant conversation where scholars and clinical staff learn from each other.

During the course of 2015, Riggs selected and welcomed three Erikson Scholars into the Riggs community to live and work on a variety of projects in conversation with the clinical staff and patients.

**Dale Peterson, PhD (January – May 2015)**

Dr. Peterson is a prolific and award-winning author with more than 18 published books on subjects ranging from the history of psychiatry, primates and Jane Goodall to computers and travel across the United States and Africa. During his time as an Erikson Scholar, he worked on a book-in-progress, *Ghosts: A Story of Love and Death with Chimpanzees in the Middle*, which he described as “a complex psychological case history of grief and depression.”

**Stephen N. Xenakis, MD, Brigadier General (Ret) (June – September 2015)**

Dr. Xenakis is a psychiatrist, consultant and retired brigadier general who served 28 years in the United States Army. A regular national radio and television contributor on topics related to medical ethics, military medicine, veterans and the treatment of detainees, Dr. Xenakis spent his time at Riggs using systems theory to begin formulating a framework that will assist clinicians in the treatment of complex cases where trauma is comorbid with other issues.

**Rachael Rosner, PhD (September – December 2015)**

An independent scholar based in Boston, Dr. Rosner is a historian, writer and researcher with a particular interest in the history of twentieth-century American psychotherapy. During her time as an Erikson Scholar, she accessed archival material from when Aaron T. Beck was a Fellow in psychiatry at Riggs (1950-1952) to inform her book-in-progress, *In Beck’s Basement: Aaron T. Beck and the Emergence of Cognitive Therapy*, the first comprehensive biography of Dr. Beck.

Director of the Erikson Institute Jane G. Tillman, PhD, remarked, “The richness, depth and diversity of the scholarly work these individuals pursued during their time at Riggs, and the contributions they have made to teaching staff and patients, are unique interdisciplinary opportunities that hopefully enrich the scholars and the institution.” She went on to say, “Our hope is that by spending time at Riggs, immersed in this specialized and intensive clinical environment, we have given them a perspective that informs the projects they worked on during their time here.”

For more information on the Erikson Scholar Program, visit: www.austenriggs.org/erikson-scholar-program.