PEDIATRICS AND MENTAL RETARDATION—A CONTINUING CHALLENGE

Presentation of the C. Anderson Aldrich Award to Gunnar Dybwad

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It is a high privilege to participate in a ceremony in which the American Academy of Pediatrics honors the memory of one of its founders and most illustrious Fellows. The C. Anderson Aldrich Award for 1973 is presented to Dr. Gunnar Dybwad, Professor of Human Development at the Florence Heller Graduate School of Advanced Studies in Social Welfare, Brandeis University. The Award is made for Dr. Dybwad's contributions to the development of children, particularly those with mental retardation. Inherent in his choice as awardee by the Section on Child Development of the Academy is recognition of mental retardation as a disability in development, one that is subject to change with time, either amelioration or deterioration, depending in a major way on the child's social surroundings. It is to these latter that Dr. Gunnar Dybwad has particularly addressed himself.

For the benefit of younger members and guests of the Academy, a few biographical notes seem in order about Dr. Aldrich who died 25 years ago. Born in Plymouth, Massachusetts, in 1888, Dr. Aldrich received his early education in Boston and New York; his college and medical school degrees at Northwestern University. After general practice in Winnetka, Illinois, for five years, he limited his practice to pediatrics. While in practice, he worked at the Children's Memorial Hospital of Chicago rising to a full Professorship at Northwestern University, and succeeding Dr. Joseph Brenneman in 1941 as Chief of Staff at the Children's Memorial Hospital. In 1944 he moved to Rochester, Minnesota, and founded the Rochester Child Health Institute, interested in research on the development of normal infants and children and in a program of delivery of child care to an entire community. When Dr. Aldrich informed Dr. Brenneman that he was leaving for Rochester, he received a letter that said: "your interest seems to be keeping well children well, but I like mine sick". This diversity is a tension not to be resolved, but to be reconciled as an inherent part of comprehensive pediatric practice and education. Dr. Aldrich died in 1949, at the age of 61, only five years after moving to Rochester.

One of his greatest contributions was to the modern practice of infant feeding. It is singled out for recollection because his findings have become the conventional wisdom. For almost 40 years, we have practiced in what Powers in 1935 called "The Psychological Era of Infant Feeding," essentially the respect for an infant and his appetite instead of the insensitive rigid scheduling of times and amounts of feeding derived from a pseudoscientific misinterpretation of metabolic data.

Although Dr. Brenneman wrote a much quoted article on "The Menace of Psychiatry," Drs. Aldrich and Brenneman, from empathy with Ralph Waldo Emerson's writings and their direct observation of infants and mothers, arrived at the same conclusions, that young infants and children are to be respected as individuals, as did Dr. Freud, from analyses of histories and dreams of neurotic adults. "Babies are Human Beings: An Interpretation of Growth" was in fact the title of a best seller by Dr. and Mrs. Aldrich published in 1938.

At a time when a majority of mothers complained that children who had had the benefit of pediatric care also had anorexia, Dr. Aldrich could report 85% of his patients as good eaters. At
another time, he said that American pediatricians trained abroad had converted burgeoning knowledge of the metabolism of infants, collected for the most part in Germany, into Teutonic concepts of law and order to which American infants objected. Dr. Aldrich thought the term self-demand autocratic and substituted self-regulation. The truth is that appropriate interpretation of metabolic data strongly supported Dr. Aldrich's empiric conclusions, and we received a warm note from him for such a paper. I suppose respect for individuals can be traced to Thomas Jefferson and other founding fathers, to more recent fighters for freedom like Niemoller in Germany, Solzhenitsyn and Sakharov in the Soviet Union, Senator Benigno Aquino in the Philippines and now Archie Cox. Hillel, a Rabbinic sage, said, "What is hateful to thee, never do to thy fellow man." In Dr. Aldrich's teaching this means "don't bully little babies by stuffing them." I feel justified in this 2,000-year-old reference because Dr. Aldrich concluded one paper on child development with these sentences: "The Golden Rule has persisted throughout most civilizations and religions ever since man has recorded his acts. If he had even approximated obedience to this great law, this article would not have been necessary."  

His personal gentleness was obvious in his conduct as an examiner of the American Board of Pediatrics. In 1939, it was my good fortune to come before him. Although I was then teaching developmental milestones to medical students, he was politely, but obviously, not satisfied with my performance. He finally asked if I had any children of my own, and waved his hand at my negative answer. "You won't really know until you do." As I look back, the wave of his hand was emphasizing my lack of understanding of what we now term nonverbal transactions between infants and parents.  

Dr. Aldrich knew the importance of studying the multiple facets of child development as planned in the Rochester Institute. While Robert Aldrich may be known to many of you for his contribution to delineation of the Wieskott–Aldrich syndrome, I like to think that his effective initial direction of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development to broad-based, noncategorical programs was derived from the teachings of his father and mother, Dr. and Mrs. C. Anderson Aldrich.  

Dr. Aldrich pointed out that infants and young children were influenced by two sets of codes: one, those prescribed by civilized man, and the other by their own inherent growth impulses. The former ones were extremely variable in different geographical, cultural and even medical situations, and were imposed from without. Dr. Gunnar Dybwad, our 1973 Awardee, has been particularly concerned with those codes or forces imposed from without.  

Born in Leipzig, Dr. Dybwad received his Doctor of Laws from the University of Halle, and graduated from the New York School of Social Work in 1939. Following his arrival in this country, he surveyed penal and delinquency institutions in several states, worked at the New York State School for Boys in Warwick and in the Boys’ Vocational School of Lansing, Michigan: for an eight-year period he was supervisor of the Children’s Division of the Michigan State Department of Social Welfare. From 1951 to 1957 he was Executive Director of the Child Study Association of America, and from 1957 to 1963 of the National Association for Retarded Children. It is particularly in this last position that other members of the Academy as well as I came to know Gunnar well. He has been and continues to be a remarkably effective fighter on behalf of children with developmental disability. His energy, his understanding of the multiple factors which affect child development and his sensitivity to the divergent views of professional people in different disciplines and of lay people who are parents or governmental representatives, have formed the basis of his influence.  

The 1960s were, thanks to the Kennedys, Lyndon Johnson, and their supporters, relatively good years for governmental action on behalf of maternal and child health services in this country, and research and training in the development of children, particularly those with developmental disabilities like mental retardation. The parents who had banded together in the National Association of Retarded Children and other lay groups were important in obtaining congressional and executive action. Gunnar Dybwad, as Executive Director, and Grover Powers, as Chairman of the Scientific Advisory Board of the National Association of Retarded Children, were a remarkable team as guides for a group of parents who had reason to feel society’s neglect of their problems and to be bitter. Dr. Dybwad steered these parents, rightfully concerned with the neglect of their own children, into positive efforts on behalf of all children. In addition, he was a strong supporter of basic laboratory and clinical research. The parents, thus, helped obtain not only improved services for their own children, but also to found the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, the products of whose wide-ranging efforts will help children, born and unborn, and perhaps make up a little for our killing and maiming in Indochina.  

Dr. Dybwad’s own institutional and child wel-
fare experience with the problems of disadvantaged children, institutionalized or not, and their families and his training in law led him to concern with the legal rights of the retarded as early as 1960. His current research activities are in the field of legal and social policies as they affect the medical care of the handicapped. Young lawyers look to him for guidance and he is a member of the appropriate committee of the American Bar Association.

From 1964 to 1967, Mrs. Rosemary Dybwad and Dr. Dybwad were Co-Directors of the Mental Retardation Project of the International Union for Child Welfare in Geneva. At the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the founding of the International League of Societies for the Mentally Handicapped, Dr. and Mrs. Dybwad received the first award given by the League for Distinguished Service. They were cited for the help they have given to professional people coming for advice and to governments needing guidance. On the occasion of the Award, President Posternak said, "But, more important to many of us, parents around the world honor you for the cheer and comfort you have brought to our lives." Just as Mrs. Aldrich and Dr. Aldrich were co-workers, so Mrs. Dybwad, in whose honor the NARC now gives international fellowships, and Gunnar have been co-workers.

Songs Gunnar’s architect-father must have taught him in childhood have surfaced in his current participation in architectural committees which plan new designs for facilities. At the last meeting of the American Association of Mental Deficiency he castigated the State of New York for planning a 384-bed facility for the mentally retarded in the Bronx. Since Albert Einstein College of Medicine has an intimate stake in the Bronx State Developmental Services, Dr. Herbert Cohen, Director of these Services, dispatched a letter to Gunnar outlining our plans. From Holland came encouragement with a polite, but firm warning: no mini-Willowbrooks.

His bibliography has articles in German, Danish and Spanish as well as English. His monograph, “The Mentally Handicapped Child Under Five,” has been translated into ten languages and published in 15 countries. Titles of a few of his publications indicate the breadth of his interests: “Income and Social Services for the Mentally Retarded—A Specialized Task in Social Welfare”; “Psychiatry’s Role in Mental Retardation”; “The Programmer Needs the Architect”; “Family Life Education”; “Not All of One Mold”—the latter in the International Journal of Religious Education; “Who Shall Be the Innkeeper”; “Goals and Techniques of Parent Education”; and “Police and Children.”

Dr. Aldrich stated in an article entitled “Science and Art in Child Nourishment”: “The problem thus presented takes us out of the purely physical field, if there is any such thing, . . . we are at once given an opportunity for cooperative study with workers in allied fields dealing with the behavior of children. . . . We find ourselves associated with men and women who know more about certain aspects of the subject than we do. . . .” For his wide knowledge of social, legal, architectural, and political factors affecting child development and for his achievement in applying that knowledge, the 1973 C. Anderson Aldrich Award of the American Academy of Pediatrics is presented to Dr. Gunnar Dybwad.

REFERENCES

PEDIATRICS AND MENTAL RETARDATION—A CONTINUING CHALLENGE: Presentation of the C. Anderson Aldrich Award to Gunnar Dybwad
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Pediatrics 1974;54;486

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