CHAPTER 1
DEFINITION AND SCOPE

DEFINITION OF HEALTH PSYCHOLOGY

In this chapter, the field of health psychology and what differentiates it from behavioral medicine is discussed, and this discussion is followed by an illustration of how health psychology can contribute to the understanding and management of a major health problem.

Psychologists have a long history of interest in issues of health; however, only within the past few years has there been a movement within psychology that can be designated *health psychology*. Matarazzo's definition of health psychology has been widely accepted and was endorsed by the recently established Division of Health Psychology of the American Psychological Association (Matarazzo, 1982). The definition is as follows:

Health Psychology is the aggregate of the specific educational, scientific and professional contributions of the discipline of psychology to the promotion and maintenance of health, the prevention and treatment of illness, the identification of etiologic and diagnostic correlates of health, illness and related dysfunction, and the analysis and improvement of the health care system and health policy formation. (p. 4)

The meaning of this definition is quite clear: any activity of psychology relating to any aspect of health, illness, the health care system, or health policy formation is considered to be within the field of health psychology. What is important to note is that the activities of diverse areas of psychology, such as developmental, physiological, cognitive, and industrial-organizational, should be considered in definitions of health psychology. Health psychology deals with such basic questions as, What are the physiological bases of emotion and how do they relate to health and illness? Can biobehavioral risk factors for illness be identified...
and what are their mechanisms of action? What is stress? What factors contribute to the development of both health and illness behaviors? How does psychological knowledge contribute to the basic understanding of the etiology and management of a number of major medical problems? What roles can the psychologist play within the health care system? Health psychology should be able to integrate data from several levels of psychology when addressing these basic questions. Figure 1-1 depicts the various psychologically based sources of input in the field of health psychology.

Although health psychology as defined by Matarazzo is a relatively recent subdiscipline, models for conceptualizing the field of health psychology have already been proposed. In one such model, Stone (1982) emphasizes the concept of the health system and problems of interaction within this system. The health system, as portrayed in Figure 1-2, involves complex transactions among several of its components, ranging from the individual whose health is at issue to a number of sociocultural support systems. Stone suggests that the health psychologist may intervene at any point within the health care system. A psychologist may focus on the exchanges among various aspects of the system. For example, these could involve such psychosocial investigations as studies of the verbal interaction between patient and physician, with the goal of determining the optimal way to increase communication and ensure compliance to medical regimens.

Some psychologists focus on the prevention of disease and the promotion of health through the modification of behaviors that contribute to health risk (Weiss, 1982). Weiss points out that three general themes appear in the recent literature in health psychology: (a) health care costs are out of control, (b) chronic illness is a major concern to those involved in health, and (c) consumerism is rampant. More and more citizens are concerned with health issues and are willing to take responsibility for

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**FIGURE 1-1.** Disciplines in psychology that contribute to the field of health psychology.