Since 1950, between three and ten percent of American medical school graduates selected psychiatric careers. Until 1989, the direction of the ratio of medical school applicants to acceptance was the best predictor for medical school graduates entering psychiatry; a declining ratio predicts more students become psychiatrists. The decrease in number of graduates selecting psychiatry for 1989, 1990 and 1991 suggest new factors may be influencing career decisions. Women continue to select psychiatry in a greater proportion than men. In an attempt to understand the historical context of these trends and suggest implications and actions for the next decade, this paper presents data on the psychiatric career choice of U.S. medical school graduates beginning with the medical school graduates of 1950.

In 1980, recruitment of medical students into psychiatric residencies through the National Resident Match Program (NRMP) reached an all-time low. Only 409 U.S. medical students (2.6% of graduating senior medical students) selected first year (PGY-1) psychiatric residencies through the NRMP.\(^1\) In 1980 a number of

Sidney H. Weissman, M.D., is Professor of Psychiatry, Department of Psychiatry, Loyola University School of Medicine. Philip G. Bashook, Ed.D., is with the American Board of Medical Specialties, Evanston, Illinois.

Address reprint requests to Sidney H. Weissman, M.D., Dept. of Psychiatry, Loyola Medical Center, 2160 S. First Avenue, Maywood, Illinois 60153.
psychiatric associations co-sponsored a national conference to address issues of recruitment, "The Career Choice of Psychiatry" held in San Antonio, Texas. No systematic follow-up was undertaken at the time to ascertain if the recommended recruitment strategies affected recruitment. During the first two years after the conference there were significant increases in the number of U.S. medical school graduates entering psychiatric residencies at the PGY-1 level. However, in 1983 and 1984, the number of U.S. graduates recruited into psychiatry through the NRMP declined. Entrance of U.S. medical school graduates into psychiatry through the NRMP peaked at 744 in 1988 and then fell to 722 students in 1989 and 664 students in 1990 and 641 in 1991 (Table 1). Using NRMP data for PGY-1 positions filled with U.S. medical school graduates through the NRMP the net increase for the decade between 1980 and 1989 was 76.5%.

Measurements of in the percentage of each medical school class entering psychiatry increases when the total number of U.S. medical school graduates entering PGY-1 positions either by the NRMP or on their own is calculated as a percentage of all medical school graduates.

Considering both groups of U.S. medical school graduates who enter psychiatry at the PGY-1 level the first of July after medical school, comparable figures to NRMP data are 527 U.S. medical students entering PGY-1 residency positions in 1980 with a peak of 844 students in 1988, a decline to 755 students in 1989, and a further decline to 693 students in 1990 (Table 1). Using data on all PGY-1 positions filled with U.S. medical school graduates, the net increase for the decade between 1980 and 1989 was 30%.

In an attempt to understand the historical context of these trends this paper presents data on psychiatric career choice beginning with medical school graduates in 1950, a span of over 40 years. We propose that until 1989 the one measure that best predicted medical student selection of psychiatric careers was the direction over time of the applicant/acceptance ratio to medical school. Since 1989, this measure no longer predicts the percentage of medical graduates selecting psychiatry. We interpret this to mean new factors not reflected in the applicant/acceptance ratio are operating. Finally, we will propose a new strategy to foster recruitment in the coming decade.