Development Of An Administrative Externship In An Institution For Developmentally Disabled

by

PAUL D. COTTEN — NATHANIEL ABSTON, JR. — JOHN PHILIP WADE

ABSTRACT

The development of an administrative externship at an institution for the developmentally disabled is presented. The program utilizes extern rotations through the various departments and units of the institution to provide the student with valuable "hands on" experience in mental health administration. It is suggested that the externship program will serve to increase the number of clinical psychologists with administrative experience and training.

PROBLEM

Despite the growth and development of complex mental health facilities there are few training programs for mental health administrators. As a result, executive positions are filled with mental health professionals having little knowledge or experience in mental health administration (Feldman, 1973). The management of many facilities and programs by technically unqualified mental health administrators has touched off a debate in the mental health literature on the efficacy of clinician executives.

Most early articles, while admitting many of the difficulties inherent in such a role, attempt to justify the clinician-executive administrative arrangement and generally conclude that in spite of inadequacies, it is probably the best for mental health programs. There are exceptions to this position, notably Kal (1971), who argues that administration should be left to the administrators and the clinician should devote himself to the work for which he is trained.

The fundamental question as to whether the clinician should be an administrator is also reflected in the various training programs and educational curricula that have been proposed. Many advocate that the clinician need simply add formal education in administration to his existing clinical training to become the ideal mental health administrator (Alt & Malick, 1971; Pattison 1974). Those in an intermediate position...
propose an educational program in mental health administration that is equally appropriate for the nonclinician and the clinician. Finally, others argue just the opposite and maintain that the mental health administrator should be exclusively a nonclinician who has administrative training (Feldman, 1973).

The purpose of this paper is to describe the development of an externship training program in mental health administration for doctoral level clinical psychology students. The intent is to allow the generalization of this concept to other facilities and professions.

DESCRIPTION OF EXTERNSHIP PROGRAM

The Externship Program described in this paper is a one day per week, semester long, training experience designed to give students exposure to major facets of mental health administration. The program is conducted at Ellisville State School (ESS) under the supervision of the director. ESS is a multifaceted state supported institution serving the needs of mentally retarded and other developmentally disabled persons. In addition, special services are provided for the mentally retarded juvenile offender (MRJO) and children needing educational/psychological evaluations.

ROTATIONS

The clinical extern (in this case from a nearby APA approved doctoral program in psychology) rotates through each of the major units which make up the center. The extern works directly with middle-level supervisory staff learning how each administrative unit operates. Particular emphasis is placed on learning the organizational structure of each unit and acquiring an understanding of the particular program in operation. Occasionally, the extern attends unit staff meetings and gets the opportunity to participate in decision-making activities.

After the extern has rotated through each of the five units (Medical, Community Services, Evaluation, Skilled Nursing, Intermediate Care), one day per week is spent at each of nine other departments. Again, the extern works directly with supervisory staff in learning how each of the departments operate. The nine departments are:

(1) Business Management — emphasis placed on understanding budget preparation and overall operation of the center.

(2) Personnel Department — emphasis placed on understanding hiring, center policy, credit union, group medical/life insurance, grievance, employee hearings, etc.

(3) Statistics and Records — emphasis placed on understanding the documentation required by the state, and Federal agencies, confidentiality of records and the use of statistics in preparing grant applications, etc.

(4) Mississippi Industries for Developmentally Disabled - (MIDD) — emphasis placed on understanding the operation of small businesses which utilize developmentally disabled clients as workers. Also securing of contracts, materials, etc.

(5) Community Living — emphasis placed on understanding the process of acquiring housing for residents (e.g. retarded) in the community and the business of the day-to-day operation of such. Meetings with city officials, attending hearings, etc.

(6) School — emphasis placed on understanding the operation of Special Education programs at the institution and compliance with public law 94-142.

(7) Art and Drama Department — emphasis placed on understanding the operation of these supplementary Educational/Vocational programs and how they support the school and its programs.

(8) Recreation Department — emphasis placed on understanding the operation of the department with special attention given to planning events which serve the center wide residential population.

(9) Dietary Department — emphasis placed on understanding the operation of the food service and food preparation. Special attention given to planning meals, purchasing food, and preparation of special diets, etc.

SPECIAL PROJECT AND CONSULTATION

During the second semester at the institution a good deal of time is spent in direct consultation with the director. Occasionally the extern will accompany the director on trips to the state-level office for meetings or conferences as well as to other institutions in the state. The extern is required to attend at least one meeting of the State Mental Health Board which is the institutional governing body. The major portion of the extern's time, however, is spent working in one of the units and in preparing for and implementing special projects approved by the director (e.g. developing new programs, policies and procedures, writing a grant application, conducting inservice training for new employees).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In summary, the externship program at ESS provides the student with exposure and training in major facets of mental health administration in an institution for the developmentally disabled. By rotating through the