Characterization of Psychiatry Residency Training Programs

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Psychiatry residency training programs were characterized on four dimensions in a pilot study of seven West Coast schools. Residents and faculty rated their programs on academic versus clinical, community-based versus institution-based, private versus public practice, and biological versus psychological orientation. Faculty and residents from the same schools differed only on the academic-clinical dimension. Significant differences existed between schools on each axis. Variation in ratings on the biological-psychological axis suggests that claims to a "biopsychosocial" orientation may be too broad to be meaningful. This method of dimensional ratings appears appropriate for program assessment and deserves further development.

Several authors have reported on the knowledge and skills deemed necessary for trainee psychiatrists (1-3) and on the personal attributes of such trainees (4), but few have investigated the nature of the training programs themselves (5,6). This lack of information is obviously a serious impediment for undergraduate and graduate students choosing residency programs and for faculty who wish to compare their programs with others and to set goals for their own. Those needs are presently met by word-of-mouth reports based upon impressionistic assessments.

In a related issue, it has become evident from the number of allusions in the literature that a "biopsychosocial" (or "eclectic") viewpoint has become the predominant conceptual mode in psychiatry (7-9). However, the characteristics of this viewpoint have not been made explicit, although some interesting efforts to do so have begun (10,11). Therefore, training programs that claim to function in accordance with this principle may in fact vary widely in their orientation and content.

The aims of the current study were to characterize psychiatry residency training programs based upon the views of both faculty and residents; to utilize this characterization to examine whether differences exist between programs; to examine whether the perceptions of faculty and residents within programs differ; and to investigate whether the programs agree on the meaning of the biopsychosocial concept.

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Psychiatry Residency Program Characterization Project

Instructions: Place one check on each of the four scales below.

Academic or Clinical Emphasis
Academic: Emphasis is on teaching, theory, and research.
Clinical: Emphasis is on the practical applications of theory.

Academic | Clinical

Community-Based or Institution-Based Emphasis
Community-based: The program is linked widely into community services and is used readily as a resource by the community.
Institution-based: The focus of the program lies within the institution itself.

Community-based | Institution-based

Private Practice or Public Psychiatry Orientation
Private practice: Training is primarily directed toward private office practice.
Public psychiatry: Teaching and training is focused most strongly on psychiatry as practiced in hospitals, shelters, mental health centers, and other societal institutions.

Private practice | Public psychiatry

Biological, Eclectic, or Psychological Focus
Biological: The chief focus of teaching, training, research, and clinical practice is on neurochemistry, neuropathology, neuropsychopharmacology, and related fields.
Eclectic: Teaching, training, and research give equal weight to elements arising from biological as from psychological domains (also referred to as the "biopsychosocial" approaches).
Psychological: The chief focus of teaching, training, research, and clinical practice is on psychological factors (including behavioral psychology) and psychoanalysis.

Biological | Eclectic | Psychological