

Obituary

Editor: Henry R. Rollin

**JACK KAHN, formerly Consultant in Charge,
Newham Mental Health Service, London**



Jack Kahn, who died on 3 December 1989, was born into an orthodox Jewish family in Huddersfield in 1904. He had a distinguished undergraduate career at Leeds University where he graduated MB ChB (Honours) in 1928 and was awarded the MD in 1948. He obtained the DPM in 1948 and was elected a Foundation Fellow of the College in 1971. He entered general practice in his town of birth shortly after graduation – specialisation at that time was hardly possible for a doctor with very limited means. Always endowed with a strong sense of civic duty and the drive to involve himself in affairs beyond his professional work, he entered local politics and became successively chairman of the Health Committee and vice-chairman of the Education Committee.

After the second world war he trained as a psychiatrist. He was strongly influenced in his practice both by psychoanalytic concepts and by his concern for deprived children and was appointed to posts in child psychiatry in Leeds, Harrogate and then Crawley. A far-sighted medical officer of health in the London Borough of West Ham attracted Jack to London in the early 1960s to establish a community mental health service and he worked in the East End of London (first in West Ham and then in the newly created borough of Newham) until his retirement. After his retirement, he worked for some years as a locum at the Whittington Hospital, remaining professionally active until very shortly before his death.

He was an inspiring teacher and much in demand to lecture. His thoughtful and broad-ranging approach

to his subject was fortunately made more widely available in numerous publications. His book on school refusal *Unwillingly to School* is widely quoted. *Job's Illness* is a modern interpretation of the Book of Job using a range of psychological and social insights. *Human Growth and the Development of Personality* has also had a great deal of success, and is widely read.

He had an extremely active professional life. His involvement with the Royal Medico-Psychological Association led to his election first, as Secretary of the Child Psychiatry Section from 1960–62 and then as its chairman from 1967–69. He served on the Council of the National Association of Mental Health, and was a founder trustee of the Child Guidance Trust (now called Young Minds). Throughout his professional life he was concerned to promote activities which brought professionals from different disciplines to work for deprived and disturbed children. By the example of his insightful clinical work, and by his teaching and political activities, he inspired the same concerns in many others who followed him in this area of work.

Jack was a much loved and well-known figure in the child psychiatric world. He was unmistakable in appearance and manner – a rather short, well-rounded man with wise, amused eyes, who expressed his views often in rather paradoxical fashion in a north country accent spiced with a good deal of wit. At a meeting on medico-political issues concerning child welfare that had been hitherto marked by strong, though conflicting views on the way policy should go, Jack interpolated “There has been a great deal too much clear thinking expressed this evening”, and went on to take us through the complexities of the subject we were discussing with, one has to say, a great deal more clarity than had previously been apparent.

His wife, Florence, died in 1988 after 56 years of marriage. He is survived by two daughters, one of whom is a child psychotherapist and the other a polytechnic lecturer in education.

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