

## *Editorial*

# Psychogeriatrics and Medical Informatics

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The rapid growth of the field of psychogeriatrics, spurred on by aging populations, substantially increased funding, and growing interest by professionals, government, and society, has led, in turn, to a rapid growth of medical information. The management of this information poses a significant challenge to health care professionals and scientists. This rapid growth of knowledge has spawned a whole new field, "Medical Informatics." This field concerns itself with the "cognitive, information processing, and communication tasks of medical practice, education and research, including the information science and the technology to support these tasks" (Greenes & Shortliffe, 1990).

Within psychogeriatrics this information comes from a variety of sources:

1. *Journals*, as well as other specialized educational vehicles, have proliferated over the past four years. Until the late 1980s, psychogeriatric articles mainly appeared in the *Journal of the American Geriatric Society* and *The Gerontologist*. The Boston Society for Gerontologic Psychiatry established the *Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry* in 1967 and has published this on a semi-annual basis since then. The newer journals include the *Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry and Neurology*, *Journal of Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders*, *The Journal of Neuroscience*, *Clinical Gerontologist*, *The International Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry* (which may expand to monthly publication in 1991), and the *Journal of Aging, Behavior, and Health Policy*. *International Psychogeriatrics*, published semi-annually since its inception, will have at least one supplementary issue in 1991, and possibly a second. Moreover, the American Association of Geriatric Psychiatry will begin publishing a journal in 1991.

In addition, digests, such as *Geriatric Neuropsychiatry Newsletter*, as well as *Abstracts in Social Gerontology*, are now available. Further, well-established journals such as *Neurobiology of Aging*, *Experimental Aging Research*, and *The Gerontologist* continue as significant sources of information. Finally, broader medical and scientific journals are publishing an increasing number of manuscripts on psychogeriatric activities.

Pharmaceutical companies have been increasingly involved in providing other informational vehicles. Fidia now provides faxes on selected topics, conveyed on

a regular basis. Burroughs -Wellcome is distributing an easy-to-file system on a variety of topics. Yet other pharmaceutical companies have been active in producing and providing movies, audio cassettes, and video tapes.

2. *Books*. The first two textbooks were published in 1980 (Busse & Blazer, Eds., 1980; Birren & Sloane, Eds., 1980). In 1990 alone, five textbooks were either published or were in the final stages for publication. Further, the number of books in the field is rapidly proliferating. Springer Publishing Company alone lists 15 recent titles. The Third and Fourth Congresses of the International Psychogeriatric Association produced a two-volume book (Bergener & Finkel, Eds., 1990), a publishing of selected abstracts (Hasegawa & Homma, Eds., 1990), and two special journal issues of psychogeriatric abstracts (Finkel, Ed., 1987; Finkel, Ed., 1989).

3. *Conferences and Meetings*. Just over a decade ago, it was difficult to find outstanding meetings in the field of psychogeriatrics. The World Health Organization did attempt to have such meetings every three years. The Boston Society for Gerontologic Psychiatry had a half-day semi-annual meeting. Nowadays, it is unusual for a week to pass without announcement of a meeting dealing with some aspect of psychogeriatrics. IPA has played a leadership role, with two meetings a year, and every fourth meeting a large congress. In addition, activity within the World Health Organization, World Psychiatric Association, national and regional organizations in psychogeriatrics and geriatric psychiatry, and governmentally sponsored symposia and conferences all have contributed to broad dissemination of information on relevant psychogeriatric topics.

4. *Inter-Governmental Reports*. These include reports published by the United Nations, the United States government—including federal agency reports—and World Health Organization-sponsored reports.

5. *Pharmaceutical Support*. Increasingly, pharmaceutical companies have been supportive of research and educational efforts in the field of psychogeriatrics. Sandoz began its Gerontological Research Awards in 1984. Bayer began its IPA–Bayer AG Research Awards in Psychogeriatrics in 1989. Mead Johnson has provided scholarships for geriatric psychiatrists in training to attend educational meetings. This is a trend that will continue.

Although we are unsure where the explosion of information will lead us in the 1990s, we can be assured that it will be increasingly difficult for any of us to keep up with even a specific area in the field of psychogeriatrics. We will need to rely increasingly on more sophisticated and increasingly individualized information systems in order to do our best to keep abreast of new knowledge, so that we may be of greatest benefit to our patients. It is imperative that individuals or groups devise new systems for the professional to manage the overabundance of good information. International Psychogeriatrics welcomes reports of such new systems—or ideas for creating them.

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