William Ryan: and In Critical Condition, by Senator Edward Kennedy, to name a few. The important difference between Dr. Seham’s book and all of those just cited is the fact that his book deals exclusively with the health status of the Black population. In the other books, this subject becomes only one of several items discussed during the course of a general coverage of the health problems of all Americans. Dr. Seham apparently feels that the medical care dispensed to Black Americans is so deficient that this problem warrants having an entire book devoted to it, not just a section or a chapter. This makes it, along with Medicine in the Ghetto by John Norum, one of only two important works giving exclusive attention to this matter.

The book itself is filled with information about the health of Black Americans. It provides detailed documentary facts that convincingly demonstrate the atrocities which have been committed against our largest and most abused racial minority group. After reading it, one gets the impression that Black people have been exposed more to careless medical care than to medical care. This is epitomized by the author’s presentation of some statistics of the medical findings on the first 2,000,000 children enrolled in the Head Start preschool program in 1969: 180,000 failed a vision test; 60,000 needed eyeglasses; 60,000 had bad skin disease; 1,300,000 had dental disease; 1,200,000 had mental retardation or a learning problem requiring evaluation by a specialist; 20,000 had a bone or joint problem; 1,300,000 had dental disease; 1,200,000 had not been vaccinated against measles.

Perhaps more impressive than these and other vital statistics cited in Blacks and American Medical Care are the anecdotal accounts of the experiences which Dr. Seham, who is nearly 90 years old, has accumulated in over 63 years of medical practice. Those who conscientiously object to our neglectful, obsolete, dollar-driven system of health care will be touched, and perhaps will derive incentive from Dr. Seham’s prologue, “The Ruminations of a Troubled Physician.”

The author of this book had to possess a rare combination of long experience in medicine, scientific expertise, social sensitivity and common sense. Dr. Max Seham admirably satisfies all of these requirements, and as such, he is indeed a rare individual, a unique gift to the medical profession. He was a pioneer crusader for better medical care for Blacks decades before it became fashionable. For him to write a book such as this, in the twilight of a long and impressive career, emphasizes the seriousness that he attaches to the social injustice which he has been associated with, the neglect of the care of long-term supplies (physical, psychosocial, and sociocultural resources) to the population, evaluating the significance of life-crisis, and furnishing services which can foster healthy crisis-coping. Although this book is broad in scope, it outlines clearly and succinctly the principles and practices which can begin to offer solutions to the difficult, complex problems involved in the prevention of mental illness and psychosocial malaise.

The 1973 chapter, “Support Systems,” presents the culmination of the author’s thoughts on prevention and mental health care. He focuses on the importance of comprehensive programs which use specialists, community networks of professionals, and nonprofessional care-givers, such as mutual-help groups. Caplan sees communities as sources of psychopathology as well as social pathology; prevention and amelioration require efforts directed at pathogenic elements and systems within the community. Such comprehensive efforts can rectify the deficiencies in community life that result from the loss of the corps interna which Durkheim believed would produce the casualties of the 20th century’s technoculture and the deleterious anomie of individuals and families. Tardly, we are beginning to acknowledge that behavioral deviance and mental illness should be studied and treated from the institutional, community, and systems levels rather than from an almost exclusive emphasis on the deviant or the patient. This book is highly recommended to students and professionals interested in the social sciences and medicine.


Community mental health workers will be pleased about the release of this volume containing ten of Gerald Caplan’s previously unpublished lectures from the years 1953–1973. These chapters present the development of his thoughts about crisis intervention, mental health consultation, various professionals’ roles, and prevention. Now, Caplan shares his awareness of the importance of social support systems for the psychosocial well-being of individuals and groups. Principles of crisis intervention, originally outlined by Erich Lindemann and elaborated by Caplan over the last 25 yr, have become incorporated into community mental health work. Lectures from the 1950s on the nurse’s role and the social worker’s role have been instrumental in enabling them to function as established professionals—usually, in teams, or in consultative work—as professionals who can promote mental health care. The chapter, “Practical Steps for the Family Physician in the Prevention of Emotional Disorder,” was originally published in JAMA in 1959.

Finally, republication now will bring it to the attention of more family practitioners and other physicians who can apply the public health models mentioned by Caplan to the many patients and families they serve.

Personally, the most interesting chapter is the 1964 lecture, “Preventing Mental Disorders.” The author emphasizes that primary prevention calls for improving the provision of long-term supplies (physical, psychosocial, and sociocultural resources) to the population, evaluating the significance of life crises, and furnishing services which can foster healthy crisis-coping. Although this chapter is broad in scope, it outlines clearly and succinctly the principles and practices which can begin to offer solutions to the difficult, complex problems involved in the prevention of mental illness and psychosocial malaise.
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