Editorial

Psychogeriatrics and Medical Informatics

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

3. Conferences and Meetings. Just over a decade ago, it was difficult to find
outstanding meetings in the field of psychogeriatrics. The World Health Organi-
zation 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
device new systems for the professional to manage the overabundance of good
information. International Psychogeriatrics welcomes reports of such new sys-
tems—or ideas for creating them.
REFERENCES


Sanford I. Finkel, M.D., Managing Editor
Gene D. Cohen, M.D., Ph.D., Editor-in-Chief
Manfred Bergener, M.D., Associate Editor
Kazuo Hasegawa, M.D., Associate Editor