

Obituary

Editor: Henry R. Rollin

JUDA JOANNES GROEN, Retired, Department KNO, Academic Hospital, University of Leiden, Holland

Professor J. J. Groen, who died suddenly on 16 June 1990, aged 86, will be remembered by many as a remarkable physician, an outstanding pioneer in various fields of medical research, and a fascinating man.

He was born in Amsterdam, the son of a modest Jewish diamond worker. Because of his excellent performance at school, a Jewish fund gave him a grant to study medicine, although his primary interest was in chemistry. He graduated in 1927 and then worked with Dodds and with Harrison in London, Snapper in Amsterdam, and finally with Minot and Castle in Boston. This was the start of a lifetime of active research, which continued right up to the day of his death, and produced more than 400 scientific publications.

The Nazi occupation of Holland brought about Groen's dismissal from the University. This restricted his practice to a few patients hiding from the Germans. With plenty of time to take their histories in minute detail, he found a predictable relationship between specific emotional conflicts and specific somatic disease. After the war, he discussed these findings with Gregg, then the director of the Rockefeller Foundation. During these discussions Groen stated his opinion to the effect that psychiatry was the one medical discipline most in need of scientific development. Gregg then challenged him to present a plan of action by which this could be achieved. Groen's concept stressed the paramount importance of a multidisciplinary approach in psychiatric research, as was already prevalent in somatic medicine. This was the basis on which the Rockefeller Foundation provided him with a grant for research in psychosomatic medicine.

Groen then gathered around him a remarkable team of researchers, which included a physiologist, a psychologist, an anthropologist, a psychoanalyst and two more physicians other than himself. Outstanding contributions continued to flow for some years from this Amsterdam group, on e.g. psychophysiological research, the influence of conditioning in symptom production, syndrome-shift, and methods for getting round psychosomatic patients' superstability (alexithymia) which defeats standard psychological tests. Another major contribution was the demonstration of the mechanism causing the asthmatic wheeze, which proved decisively how

emotional conflicts can result in an asthmatic attack (*Lancet*, 1957). He confirmed these findings through his studies on the effectiveness of group psychotherapy with asthmatic patients. Also, in the early 1970s, he was the first to use the group approach in the education of diabetic patients, again with singular success.

With his disdain for medical dogma and his original ideas and research results, which were often 20 years ahead of their time, it was almost unavoidable that there would be clashes with the medical establishment. In 1958 Groen left Amsterdam and was given a chair at the Hadassah University of Jerusalem, where he continued his research into psychosocial factors in the origin of coronary heart disease, the treatment of patients with anorexia nervosa, and into behavioural features of hypertension-prone rats.

Recognition did, however, follow. Groen was elected FRCP, FRCPsych, FACP, FICPM. He received a Royal decoration in Holland, and several medals and honorary memberships of scientific societies internationally.

Groen was a gifted teacher. His lectures were gems of clarity and logic, always focused on the patient, both as a medical case and as a person, and always closing by hinting at the challenge of as yet unknown and uncharted areas of scientific knowledge.

Groen's interests were many and varied, and his intellectual curiosity not restricted to strict medical science alone. He was, for instance, greatly intrigued by the controversy around Van Gogh's psychiatric condition. On the basis of family documents otherwise unavailable, he developed a new theory on the psychodynamics of the painter's disorder. He was also fascinated by Napoleon, and made a study of his medical history and of his physicians. Once he started a clinical lecture on this subject by pointing at a bust of Napoleon and saying: "Here we have a 40-year-old professional soldier, who . . .". Another of his interests concerned Spinoza, of whom he was an ardent scholar, and whom he admired especially for his 'holistic' philosophy, free from Cartesian dualism, about three centuries *avant la lettre*. And around his much loved cottage in the woodlands of central Holland, he experimented in ecological forestry. His revolutionary ideas in this field drew the attention of many experts.

Clearly, Groen was a *homo universalis*, a renaissance man, a great physician, but foremost a warm and caring human being, loved by his patients and

pupils alike. His devotion to his profession, which so often made him impatient with mainstream medical practice, was all-pervasive, and is best described in his own words: "There are no diseases of no interest, only doctors with no interest!". Groen's death will be mourned throughout the medical world, and our deepest sympathy goes out to those closest to him.

JB
HEP

**MAXWELL JONES, CBE, Consultant Psychiatrist,
RRI, Wolfville, Nova Scotia, Canada**

Maxwell Jones, one of the greatest therapeutic pioneers of British post-war psychiatry, died on 19 August 1990 in Nova Scotia. He is remembered mostly as the creator of the first and most famous 'therapeutic community' the Social Rehabilitation Unit at Belmont Hospital, Surrey (now the Henderson Hospital). However, he made many other contributions to the revolutionary changes in British institutional psychiatry in the early days of the National Health Service, which made British psychiatric hospitals for a brief period an example for all western psychiatry by virtue of their open doors, patient freedom and active rehabilitation.

Born in South Africa in 1907 of an American mother and a Scots father, he was brought up in Edinburgh, attending Daniel Stewart's College and Edinburgh university, where he graduated in medicine in 1931. He studied psychiatry at Edinburgh under David Henderson, in the United States (on a Commonwealth Fund Fellowship) and at the pre-war Maudsley under Aubrey Lewis.

It was the 1939 war which gave him the opportunity to develop his revolutionary ideas. A research unit was set up at Mill Hill to investigate DAH ('disordered action of the heart') which had got many men out of the trenches of World War I and was being diagnosed quite frequently in the conscripts of World War II. The research (which later gained him a gold medal for his MD thesis) soon established that this was a psychosomatic fear reaction. But it was while talking with the demoralised and anxious conscripts that he first discovered the great power of group discussions to heal anxieties and the fact that many people will accept comments and interpretations from fellow sufferers that they reject when they come from powerful doctors.

He extended these ideas in work with returned prisoners of war at Dartford, when he encouraged these shamed and demoralised men to take responsibility for the running of the unit, as a preliminary to taking responsibility again for their own lives. After the war he began to work for the Ministry of Labour with the emotionally disturbed unemployable

(labelled by psychiatrists, then, as 'psychopaths'). Thus developed the famous Belmont Unit. At that time the only models for psychiatric institutions were the large regimented, locked-up county asylums with their prison-like regimes administered by uniformed staff, or the small psychiatric units which attempted to mimic general hospital wards with white coats for doctors, starched uniforms for nurses, glittering instruments and surgical cleanliness. At Belmont there emerged a different model – a community devoted to exploring emotional and social difficulties and interactions where everyone, staff and patients, dressed alike, looked alike and interacted freely and equally. At the community meeting anyone, but especially the Director – "Max" as he was always called – was open to challenge, criticism and interpretation. It was a revelation to all in those days who were seeking better ways to organise psychiatric institutions. Belmont became a place of pilgrimage for pioneering spirits of all professions in British psychiatry and for social scientists from all over the world. Research, professional books, articles, films and TV programmes poured from it. Max was awarded a CBE.

In 1959 Max went to Stanford University, California as Visiting Professor for a year (when the American Psychiatric Association awarded him their prestigious Isaac Ray Award) and then for three years to the State Hospital at Salem, Oregon (where the film 'One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest' was later made). He started many new projects there but was finally rejected by the political establishment of Oregon State.

In 1963 he came back home to Scotland as Medical Superintendent of Dingleton Hospital, Melrose – already famous as the first (1949) Open Door Hospital in Britain. Critics had said that although the therapeutic community method worked at Belmont with psychopaths, it would not work with psychotics. At Dingleton Max showed that a therapeutic community could develop in a traditional mental hospital. After changing the inner structure of the hospital and considerably emptying it, he moved their work out into the Border towns with specialist multidisciplinary teams and set up a pattern of community care which still endures as a model. He continued to travel widely in Britain and the USA consulting at hospitals and clinics; his visits were always exciting, leaving the institution astir with argument, fury and delight.

In 1970 Max retired from the NHS and went back to North America – first to Denver, Colorado, to the Virgin Islands, to Phoenix, Arizona and finally to Nova Scotia. In each place he consulted with local mental health facilities, lecturing, cajoling, stimulating. At first he travelled continuously, back to Europe, across the States, calling himself a "social ecologist". He worked in prisons and schools and