

Obituary

H.R. Beech

Reg Beech died on 17 June 1992 at the age of 66. He had been aware that he was suffering from cancer for nearly five years, but he continued to work until the last few days of his life. His last illness was mercifully short.

Reg was born in Doncaster in 1925. His first degree was in Economics, which he obtained at the University of Durham in 1951. Realising that his main interests lay in the field of psychology, he then took the Diploma in Psychology (University of London), before moving to the Institute of Psychiatry where he worked for thirteen years, completing his PhD in 1957, and being appointed Senior Lecturer in 1961. After four years heading the Clinical Psychology Department at the Netherne Hospital, he moved to Manchester (1973) as Head of Clinical Psychology Services for South Manchester, and was appointed to an Honorary Chair in Clinical Psychology in 1980.

Reg trained as a clinical psychologist at a time when the potential value of behavioural methods in the treatment of psychological disturbance was just beginning to be appreciated in this country. He played a major part in developing and promoting behaviour therapy as a cornerstone of professional clinical psychology. He was impressed by the elegant simplicity of the methods of behaviour therapy, and while he never regarded these methods as a panacea for all psychological ailments, he perceived that their emphasis on straightforward practical matters made them widely applicable, not only to recognized psychological disorders, but also to ubiquitous manifestations of human discomfort outside the clinic. This led him to write about behavioural principles not only for the psychological community, but also for the wider public. Thus his publications include popular books and articles on behaviour therapy, alleviating marital disharmony and coping with occupational stress, as well as a large number of academic publications on a range of clinical topics, including stuttering, phobias, obsessional states, sexual dysfunction and stress.

Throughout his career, Reg was committed to the idea of clinical psychology as an applied science. He believed strongly that psychology could and should espouse the rigours of a biological science cast in the Popperian mould. Although he never underestimated the subtlety and complexity of human behaviour, he did not accept these as an excuse for loosely defined psychological concepts. To the contrary, he argued that the very complexity of human behaviour made the strict application of operational definitions and the constant experimental scrutiny of hypotheses all the more indispensable for psychology in general and for clinical psychology in particular. For Reg, the main business of clinical psychology was to apply scientifically validated psychological principles to the treatment of individual patients. He there-

fore regarded it as paramount that clinical psychology should retain the strongest possible ties with experimental psychology; he had little sympathy either with the “generic therapist” model or with the “managerial” approach to service delivery.

From 1973, when he moved to Manchester, he devoted the major part of his working life to clinical psychology training. He brought together a group of colleagues working in the North West to set up Manchester University’s MSc Course in Clinical Psychology, and he chaired the committee that ran this course until his retirement in 1990. His concern for a truly scientific approach to clinical psychology was strongly reflected in the teaching programme provided on the course, as well as in his personal involvement in clinical and research supervision which he continued to provide until his retirement. He had a particular interest in helping psychology graduates from countries without training programmes of their own, and under his influence the Manchester course has supplied trained clinical psychologists to many countries of southern Europe, the Middle East, the Indian subcontinent and the Far East. The University of Manchester recognized his outstanding contribution to clinical psychology training with the establishment in 1991 of the “Beech Prize” for excellent performance on the MSc course.

Reg was a dedicated family man. He is survived by the two sons from his marriage to Jean, who died in 1974, his second wife, Loukie, who is a clinical psychologist, and their two sons. They have the deep sympathy of Reg’s many friends and colleagues.

C.M. BRADSHAW