

THE PROPOSED "DECADE OF REHABILITATION"

... *guest editorial*

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Plans are being developed to proclaim the 1970s as "The Decade of Rehabilitation." The formal launching of the campaign will take place at the Eleventh World Congress of the International Society for Rehabilitation of the Disabled in Dublin, Ireland, September 14 to 19, 1969.

While it is recognized that "days" and "years" and "decades" have become somewhat commonplace instruments for the promotion of organizational objectives, it is nevertheless believed that the priority requirements of the rehabilitation community may be accurately expressed and effectively mobilized within the concept of a 10-year effort. It is certain that international activities will benefit from two essential elements of such an effort: the possibility of coordinating programs in the context of an agreed long-range plan; and the occasion to forecast such measures as training opportunities over a period of several years.

Rehabilitation International (as the ISRDC has agreed to designate itself without a formal change of name) is developing specific goals for the Decade of Rehabilitation, and it is hoped that other organizations will either join in the realization of these objectives or establish parallel targets of their own. In all cases, communications among agencies will remain of major importance.

It may, therefore, be of value to describe at this time the general goals we believe should be incorporated in plans for the decade:

1. *To awaken increased public interest in the growing dimensions of the problem of disability in all countries and in the economic and social advantages of providing adequate services.* All evidence points to a substantial and predictable growth in the numbers of disabled persons due to population expansion, industrial development, and decline in mortality rates. It is essential to plan now for the rehabilitation requirements of the future and to obtain public support for the implementation of such plans.

2. *To encourage governments to give a higher priority to the problems of disability and to make the necessary budgetary allocations for*

their part in their solution. It has become increasingly evident in all parts of the world that the volume of necessary rehabilitation services can be provided only when governments assume a major responsibility for them while respecting the vital role of voluntary bodies. Particularly in the newly developing nations, confronted as they are with a seemingly endless list of pressing problems, it is necessary to stress continuously the value of investing no win rehabilitation plans which will in the long run produce financial as well as human gains.

3. *To make available to the countries needing it, guidance in planning and developing rehabilitation services.* An estimated 65 percent of the nations in today's world have grossly inadequate facilities to assist their disabled. They need help in planning and in acting, and one of the main responsibilities of international organizations and of agencies in the developed countries should be to provide that help.

4. *To increase in volume and accelerate in pace the training of professional and auxiliary personnel needed to man rehabilitation facilities.* No country has an excess of qualified personnel; most countries have pitifully few. Present training methods and facilities are not closing the gap, and they are not even beginning to keep up with the predictable increase in requirements. Revolutionary thinking is required if we are to staff adequately the programs of the future while preserving the essential criteria for qualified performance. The effort should be two-pronged: we must increase the number and capacity of training facilities, and we must seek more efficient patterns of training with possibly revised concepts of the functions of various categories of personnel.

5. *To develop methods and procedures which will facilitate the delivery of more service to larger numbers of persons at lower cost in personnel time and in other scarce resources.* At first glance, that idea may appear utopian; but, as one observes developments around the world, it is apparent that more and more practitioners realize the necessity of reexamining some of the sacred precepts of the rehabilitation community with a view to equating the possibilities of service with the requirements of an ever larger disabled population. As in other fields of human endeavor, we must open our minds to new alternatives.

It is significant that the Decade of Rehabilitation is being mounted on an international scale, and in keeping with the fact that the rehabilitation movement has evolved in a global framework. As much as any field of endeavor, services for the disabled in any country have been improved as a result of experience and innovation in other countries. Practitioners in the field have wanted and maintained a high level of international communication; assistance has been provided by national and international agencies not only for the inception of facilities in the new countries, but also for the further development and perfection of serv-

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ices in the nations with longer experience. This existing global attitude and network of interest combine to provide a firm international basis for the Decade and it is of course appropriate that the International Society program be in harmony with those assets.

People and institutions engaged in prosthetics research have in the past made significant international contributions to the improvement of quality and to the facilitation of delivery of their part of the rehabilitation process. The challenge remains, however, to continue the innovation of simpler devices which can be provided in settings where personnel and economic resources are limited, and to agree on definition of functions and on training procedures which will support the development and delivery of services in accord with the expanding need.

Serious consideration has been given to these questions in a number of forums, including particularly the Inter-Regional Seminar on Standards for the Training of Prosthetists, organized in 1968 by the United Nations and the Government of Denmark with the cooperation of the ISRD's International Committee on Prosthetics and Orthotics. Viewed from some of the least developed areas of the world, however, the conclusions reached to date seem to some degree remote from reality, and the responsible institutions should carry the process of reexamination forward with particular attention to the objectives cited above.

Similarly, it is hoped that other professional groups will examine the functions and related training requirements of their constituencies with the twin goals of preserving and strengthening essential professional qualifications while insuring a maximum contribution to the expansion and acceleration of the delivery of services. Rehabilitation International is planning a meeting of experts from the various professions to consider the means of stepping up development, possibly through a reappraisal of the various stages of service which can realistically be anticipated as we engage in the necessary processes of recruiting and training personnel, evolving indigenously acceptable standards of team practice, building and equipping the required facilities, and establishing an economic base on which all of these can be founded.

The rehabilitation fraternity can be proud of its accomplishments which, in the last 50 years, have worked a revolution in society's attitude towards and service for its disabled citizens. It is now necessary, however, to initiate a new revolution if we are to keep pace with the growth of the problem and if we are to apply to the fullest our experience and capabilities. The Decade of Rehabilitation is designed to assist all concerned in this great purpose, and the participation and support of all will be welcome.