

Foreword

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The practice of psychotherapy seems to be capable of generating an unusually high degree of enthusiasm and even blind faith among those in the field. Perhaps this phenomenon is necessary in order to attract and keep people working in this most difficult of endeavours – that of attempting to bring about change in human behaviour. The practice of family therapy is no exception. As one of the earliest workers in family therapy I can attest to the tremendous enthusiasm and excitement and the high level of commitment generated by the work carried out when the field was in its infancy. We all felt like pioneers discovering a new world or like revolutionaries about to succeed in overturning the old order, having found the ultimate solution to human behaviour problems. Indeed, some of the early workers began to talk seriously about solving such problems as war, poverty, racism – you name it – by the application of family therapy techniques.

As the field has matured there has been a trend towards objective self-examination, which has resulted in therapy outcome research and in multiple reviews of work in the field. This book is a very welcome example of this trend. Ranjan Roy and Harvy Frankel, committed scholars, teachers, and practitioners of family therapy, present here a prodigiously exhaustive critical review of the literature. Their approach is one of scientific detachment in reporting their findings, yet at the same time they maintain their strong commitment to the field. They are very knowledgeable and skilled teachers who are interested in the development of the field of family therapy, rather than in perpetuating the mythologies that have accumulated over the years.

The message of the book is sobering with regard to family therapy. Although the authors state that good outcome literature does exist,

and that this gives cause for optimism, they find that the amount of methodologically acceptable outcome research on family therapy is woefully inadequate. In their view, family therapy has yet to make a strong and persuasive case for its effectiveness based on hard data rather than only on claims of clinical success.

As with previous, less comprehensive, reviews, this study indicates that (1) in certain clinical situations family therapy may be of some benefit – and is at least better than no therapy at all; (2) there are still no indications as to the kinds of situations family therapy is most effective in; (3) there appears to be no difference in effectiveness among different techniques or styles of family therapy; and (4) family therapy does not appear to be more effective than other forms of psychotherapy.

The findings reported here are similar to the findings reported in reviews of all other types of psychotherapy; that is, the quantity and methodology of outcome research and the data concerning effectiveness were often found to be inadequate.

Although these findings are sobering, neither the authors nor I feel that discouragement is justified. What these findings indicate is that the field of treatment outcome research is actually quite young and the technology of such research is at an early stage of development. As for myself, I am at present involved in a fourth generation of outcome research in family therapy. Each generation has become more sophisticated and has enabled us to look at and consider more factors in the therapeutic process. It is hoped that as this field progresses workers will be able to study satisfactorily many important factors and variables. This optimism does not deny the complex, laborious, and time-consuming nature of this research.

My research colleagues and I have been doing outcome research in family therapy for thirty-five years; although we still feel we are just at the beginning, we are becoming more comfortable and confident with our efforts. Along with the authors I feel that family therapy is a useful endeavour. But like all the major psychotherapies now practised, it hasn't quite lived up to its original promise. Serious reflection and ongoing research such as that reported here will prove useful to practitioners in their attempts at healing human illness and improving human relationships.

This book is not only for practitioners and researchers of family therapy, but also for all those concerned with the current issues involved in the rapid developments and changes in the larger field of health care delivery. As the health care field becomes more entrepreneurial and

profit-driven there has been a strong movement to cut back on treatment, thin out the treatment process, 'dumb down' treatment teams, and in general skimp on care in order to generate profit. While some changes have been overdue and indeed welcome, there has been concern that the health care field is moving in a dangerous direction, to where profit rather than quality and effectiveness are the primary goals. To counter this concern the entrepreneurs in the field are in the forefront advocating (cynically, in my opinion) the necessity of 'quality measures' as guarantees of treatment effectiveness. While many of the measures currently in use by corporate bodies are nothing more than 'customer satisfaction surveys,' like those used in the marketing of commercial products, some corporations are now moving in a more sophisticated direction in response to pressures from knowledgeable experts in the field of treatment outcome research.

We have seen many press releases, advertisements, and statements by health care corporation executives that glibly proclaim the advent of the development of satisfactory quality indicators to satisfy their 'customers.' However, anyone who carefully reads this book will realize that such statements are not yet based on fact. The field of measuring treatment outcome is extremely complex, difficult, and time-consuming. It is a science at its earliest beginnings. This knowledge should protect us from the sales pitches of the hucksters of health care and yet give us hope for a future when we can look forward to a more mature science which will be capable of giving us meaningful and useful information on an important area of our lives.

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