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THE CASE FOR COUNSELLOR TECHNICIANS AND COUNSELLOR ASSISTANTS

ABSTRACT: The utilization of two types of paraprofessionals, a counsellor technician (CT) and a counsellor assistant (CA), are proposed to overcome the current manpower shortage of professional counsellors in college counselling centres and to alleviate the increasing demand for their services by students, staff, and faculty. The CT will carry out primarily the guidance activities of the college counselling centre, the CA will be involved primarily in the role of "gypsy" counsellor, meeting students informally, such as in the halls and college cafeteria. With the counsellor, they form an efficient, yet flexible team to serve the college population. The relationship between the CA, the CT, and the counsellor is on the level of a small group, a type of social system that is organizationally sound, and singularly suitable for a counselling centre.

It is now acknowledged that professional manpower cannot meet the mental health needs of the population through the use of present methods, and that there is no reasonable hope that such manpower can be increased sufficiently to do so in the future (Guernsey, 1969).

Paraprofessionals with their diverse specialized training are gradually proving their rightful place as an effective and necessary part of the helping professions. The medical and dental professions are becoming increasingly aware, with an agonizing slowness, that they have insufficient manpower to handle all the health problems confronting them. In the medical profession, paramedics and specially trained registered nurses are being utilized to alleviate the scarcity of doctors in remote areas of the world. Denturists, dental assistants, and hygienists are slowly being recognized as competent extensions in the field of dentistry.

A notable trend attesting to this move towards paraprofessionalism is the widespread inaccessibility and scarcity of qualified help. An ostensible solution to such a complex problem would be to increase our capacity to train professional workers. However, this is an expensive, long, and unnecessary process, since many of a professional's duties do not require advanced training, but rather could be performed by a highly specialized paraprofessional.

More specifically in the mental health field, there is incipient recognition of the need for paraprofessional services with an increasing demand for some type of specialized in-service training for the novice non-professional. Recognizing these societal demands and pressures, this paper will develop a model for paraprofessional utilization and training in a mental health setting.

Over twenty years ago, Raimy (1950) presented a paper at a psychological conference stating an explicit need for this level of training in the mental health professions, which was referred to as a technician level. In Ontario this concept was pursued, somewhat, to an extent that hospitals began to provide some form of in-service training for their unskilled staff, the purpose of this being to give these individuals some rudiments of mental health principles. This "patch-work" approach as in-service training, however, can at best serve as a "safety valve" to temporarily alleviate the pressures placed on the professional workers. It does not get at the need for a new basic approach for offering service to the general population. More recently in clinical psychology, it is being realized that there is a definite need for an individual with more comprehensive and specialized training (Davidson 1970). This need applies not solely to clinical psychology but to all areas of the psychotherapeutic professions, including social work and counselling. This latter area is our main concern here, with specific reference to the college counselling centre.

College counselling services are now faced with increasing demands, both internally and externally. The pressures externally arise from the increased number of students served by the counselling centre, the volumes of time-consuming detail and paper work, and the examination of the total counselling process by performance objective standards, or the accountability of the counselling function. Generally, internal demands are manifested by the counsellors themselves trying to constantly improve their services, whether it be providing adequate counselling facilities or, as the present trend demands, acting as consultants and/or resource persons to faculty and staff. The existing student-services dilemma makes it impossible for counsellors to meet demands for their services, resulting in a shortage of manpower even before any new attempts are made to reach out to the community which it is supposed to serve (Brigante, 1965).

Thus, with the recognition of these growing demands, the necessity for paraprofessional services comes into focus for college counselling centres. The two types of paraprofessionals proposed in this paper are the counsellor technician (CT) and counsellor assistant (CA), both of which would play an integral part in the total counselling pro-

gram. Their highly specialized training would enhance the effectiveness of the college counselling centre. It should be noted that their main function would not only be to relieve the counselling staff but also to provide new service functions and roles that were not previously being filled by professional counsellors. In addition, their services would make counsellors more accessible to the population they serve, to do the job they were prepared for. As the guidance and counselling field gains more professional prestige and as certification standards become more rigorous, the manpower dilemma facing the profession is significantly increased. The question of how to implement and develop the increasingly popular notion and practice of using ancillary help can be readily resolved. Therefore the CT and CA, being highly trained paraprofessionals, would enrich and strengthen a guidance and counselling program.

Perhaps the most important definition of the role functions that the CT and CA have is in their personal relationship with the counsellor. They would also have a peer relationship in the nature and scope of task involvement under the direction and supervision of the counsellor. The research evidence of Vriend (1969), Lippitt and Lohman (1965), and Reisman (1965) suggests that both the CT and CA being in close contact with the adolescent culture can serve as "peer influence" models for assisting students in orienting their behaviour to a new setting. The CT and CA would also have in common certain interpersonal skills, developed on the basis of a common core of education in such areas as the social sciences, guidance theory, and societal issues.

Beyond these similarities between the CT and CA, there is a certain degree of specialization necessitated by the guidance and counselling framework within which they will work.

Guidance is a broad, generic term. It includes the notion that each individual should have the opportunity to carve for himself a meaningful, self-directed life. This concept is exemplified by the usage of systematic, organized programs through the efforts of student-personnel workers in all levels of education. Counselling on the other hand is just one aspect of the total guidance program, which is a very specific, highly complex function involving goal exploration. This operational distinction is the basis for the utilization of the CT and CA in the total guidance and counselling program.

The increased importance and need for CT's in the guidance function in post-secondary institutions is reflected in the following statement in the *Draft Report* of the Commission on Post-Secondary Education in Ontario: "Indeed, we view guidance as the indispensable instrument of the kind of indicative manpower planning that is likely to prove most compatible with our social and political views. . . . In most cases, it [guidance] suffers from a lack of reliable information." Finally, the committee suggests that "...if our recommendations about the future development of post-secondary education are implemented, many more citizens of all ages *will need advice and information* about how best to satisfy their educational needs as to how

to relate them to employment prospects. This will demand *increased skills and time for guidance activities.*"

The "guidance activities" mentioned in the report would be one of the major foci of the CT. These duties and responsibilities are unrelated to the counselling role of the paraprofessionally trained CA whose job orientation is somewhat similar to the technician as a peer-influence model. In essence, the CT would be research-, data-, and information-collection-oriented with specific skills in the organization and dissemination of material used in the guidance function. The CT model is based on *two* premises: (1) by freeing the counsellor from some of his non-related counselling duties, he can devote more time to the maximizing of his counselling skills; and (2) by providing a data-collection service on students and the guidance function to the counselling unit, counsellors may have a greater awareness of the educational, motivational, and vocational background of the community-college student. Essentially, the CT's role is *research* oriented, in that necessary data will be provided to acquaint the counselling centre with the community college population that it serves.

The CT will be expected to assist in the performance of the following kinds of guidance tasks:

- (1) clerical assistance — record maintenance, development of vocational and educational files.
- (2) research collection, tabulation, and initial interpretation of data.
- (3) direct assistance to the counsellor — administration, scoring, and organizing group and individual tests.
- (4) working with students, public, and staff to provide information as requested.

Counselling, however, deals with the affective domain. It is an interpersonal process in which the counsellor helps another human being to understand and clarify his world and the interrelationships in it. The life, values, and surface behaviour of many young people are rapidly changing, but emotional needs and the capacity to adapt to social change, by comparison, move at a snail's pace. Therefore, the CA with his specialized training is utilized to help create an environment more conducive to the well-being of college students.

Like the CT, the CA would have a fundamental understanding of the entire job-functioning of the counsellor. In a sense, the CA would act as the counsellor's alter ego, preparing the counselee for the professional work of the counsellor. The CA would play a "gypsy" role out of the counselling centre, meeting the students where they congregate, such as the halls and the cafeteria. Another important role of the CA's work would be his role in the prevention of underlying problems amongst the student population. This would be during crises that arise as a result of drug and alcohol addiction, or mental health problems that are manifested as students go through the developmental stages so prominent at this time in their life. Brown and Zunker (1966) found that CA's as peer influence models were at least as effective in this helping role as professional counsellors and the students usually accepted them better.

A simplified scheme can be seen here:

	GUIDANCE	COUNSELLING
Paraprofessional — CT	X	
— CA		X
Professional Counsellor	X	X

Thus, the CT and CA would be highly trained and specialized to a point of efficiency but each would be familiar with the specialization of the other so as not to break down communications between them. Consequently, lateral communication would be facilitated; otherwise, the counsellor would have to become an interpreter between them, thus defeating the whole purpose of paraprofessional utilization.

In discussing the roles and duties of CT's and CA's, one is implicitly stating a new type of social organization for a college counselling centre. The training of counsellors is singularly beneficial for the implementation of this new type of social organization. A competent counsellor is aware of interpersonal dynamics; this awareness is a necessary asset for the functioning of the counselling centre. In the terminology of organizational theory, the counselling centre organism is a flat rather than a tall organization. A flat organization is characterized by few levels of superiors and subordinates (Weick, 1969). Generally, in a flat organization there is less necessity for close supervision of subordinates, with the subordinates feeling more autonomy and freedom and commitment with a higher productivity and job satisfaction. In a flat organization, communication is less likely to become distorted; informal, *human* relationships will develop with more substantial effects on performance. A flat organization tends to be cohesive, with low probability of the formation of "in groups" and "out groups." Thus, the flat organization is a small group rather than a bureaucratic organization. Obviously, the counsellor's special training in groups and interpersonal dynamics will help him not only to deal with counselees, but also make the counselling centre organism function efficiently.

All the elements of small group dynamics are useful in developing an efficient and cohesive organization. Some other characteristics of this organization are distributed responsibility, widespread sharing of information, and close cooperation in problem-solving. Just as the helping professions move towards greater accountability of their services so does the need for paraprofessional workers become increasingly evident. Thus, the teamwork of the paraprofessional with the professional becomes a smooth-running operation and more effective than their separate endeavours. The CT and CA help themselves while they help others and emerge as an integral part of the college counselling centre, making it more crisis strengthened and functioning at a higher level than ever before.

RESUME: Afin de pallier à la pénurie actuelle de conseillers professionnels dans les services collégiaux de consultation et de répondre à la demande croissante de service des étudiants et des professeurs, on propose d'utiliser deux sortes d'auxiliaires paraprofessionnels: un technicien conseiller (TC) (counsellor technician) et un assistant conseiller (AC) (counsellor assistant). Le TC s'occuperait principalement des activités de guidance du service de consultation, tandis que le AC serait surtout engagé dans des rencontres informelles avec les étudiants, à la cafétéria par exemple. Avec le conseiller ils pourraient constituer une équipe de service à la population du collège à la fois efficace et flexible. Les relations entre le AC, le TC et le conseiller seraient celles d'un petit groupe, c'est-à-dire celles d'un type de système social qui est fonctionnel au plan organisationnel et particulièrement approprié à un service de consultation.

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