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CONSUMER FEEDBACK AND PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

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This particular panel is entitled "Consumer Feedback and Professional Growth." The rationale behind this type of title and this presentation might be looked at in two different ways. If first we take a look at what we mean by a profession and how that profession grows and changes, we might have some indication of the necessity of looking at what our clients feel they need and how they feel about service that they have received.

Sometime ago, Borow indicated that professions have several characteristics. These might be listed as follows:

1. They possess wide theoretical knowledge.
2. That knowledge is applicable to the solution of recurrent but unstandardized vital problems.
3. Practitioners of a profession feel a sense of obligation to do the best job they know how.
4. People in a profession have a sense of identity with one another.

Additionally, another characteristic might be mentioned and that is that a profession has self-regulation through the use of a code of ethics and strict rules regarding entry into the occupation. Within each of these various characteristics, there is the implication that a profession is able to regulate itself, to be of service to its clients or to those whom it serves and to make changes within the profession itself if changes need to be made. Another item that needs to be noted here is that a profession is always an applied field. It is very difficult to have a professional identity when the theories and the ideas being espoused are not applied to some type of immediate endeavor. An example of this may be that when a man studies psychology, he is not considered to be a professional. This would be true however extensive or thorough his knowledge may be. However, once that person begins to teach psychology, he becomes a professional who needs to worry about any possible harm or effect that he might have upon other people with whom he comes in contact.

CONSUMER FEEDBACK AND PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

Parsons has indicated that the norm of rationality is the idea that a profession has the obligation to use only the best and most efficient techniques and not merely the traditional or dramatic ones which have been used in the past. This implies that a profession is always in the process of changing and upgrading itself and attempting to do what is best for the individual clients that it serves. To continue along this vein, a profession is always in the process of redefinition and is always open to change and modification. These kinds of statements apply not only to the profession of counseling but also to the many other professions which members gathered here represent. These will include the ministry, social work, psychiatry, psychology, education, interpreting, and various other areas of specialization.

If we take a look at what a profession is and how it changes and how its members behave, we begin to realize that we are always in the process of attempting to do what is best and modifying our behavior so that we can provide the most effective and efficient service to those people who seek it. This calls for some kind of information concerning the techniques which we have been using and the ways that we can change those techniques to upgrade service delivery. One of the ways to do this is by talking with people to whom we have provided service.

Another direction that is taken in upgrading a profession is through internal regulation by the profession itself. This simply means that many times members of a profession get together, decide among themselves what is best and then attempt to modify their techniques and principles of application from there. Too often this has led professional people to thinking that only they have the answers with the result that they do not seek outside help and evaluation. It is very similar to the cat chasing its tail and continually going around in circles. We simply reinforce each other's ideas and techniques of application. This type of thinking weakens and inhibits a profession since it does not really bring about change but rather causes a perpetuation of on-going processes which frequently do not respond to needs.

The true professional will look to those persons to whom he has provided services for reactions and possible recommendations for change. This does not mean to imply that clients have all of the answers. It does, however, point to the fact that the people who are receiving service do have some idea of what they want and need and should be in a position to tell us whether or not those needs are being met and, if not, how they would see the needs being resolved. This prevents inbreeding in a professional group and gives insight into what we might term the world of reality of client service.

With these two ideas in mind, this panel was established to give us some kind of information from clients and/or individuals who have received service from members of the professions represented here. Each of the two individuals who will be making a presentation has been involved in the

CONSUMER FEEDBACK AND PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

service-delivery system as either a client or a recipient of the service because they are an interested party or a parent of a client. Their background is dissimilar and the information they have to offer will probably also be quite dissimilar because of their differing views and experience in services received. They have applied for services at a number of agencies and in various states which should serve to illustrate success and failure in having needs met within a wide variety of settings. Each of them will proceed by giving a brief resume of their background, the kinds of services they sought and an indication of how these requests for services were met. Finally, they have been asked to make recommendations for possible changes in the services which they did receive. At the conclusion of both of their presentations, I will attempt to summarize what has been said and then open the meeting for questions to either myself or the panel members. It is hoped that the discussion will provide stimulus for thought and ideas of how many of the current practices and trends in the professional fields concerned with deafness might be reexamined and reconsidered for their appropriateness.