

The Clinic That Cares About Students

Sometimes the campus seems overbearing, unfriendly, and tremendous to the young student, especially when he is not feeling well or when problems arise that he can't put into perspective and overcome.

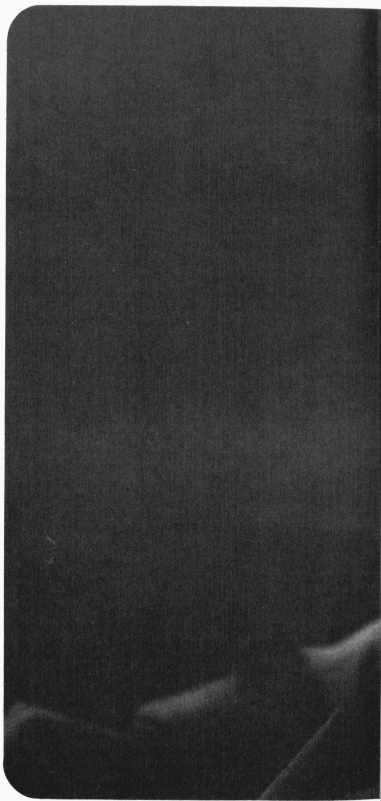
Asian flu touched every university this year. Who will take care of the student? He can't go home to the family doctor. There's no mother to get his medicine or fix his meals and bring them to him in bed.

Or maybe a student just has a bad cold. He has a test in zoology in two days but his hacking cough keeps him from grasping what he's studying. It's depressing and lonely for anyone who is sick, but a sick student feels a particular emptiness. Does anyone care?

Take John, who was always at the top of his class in grades, sports, and activities in high school. The first theme he gets back in college is marked C-, and he doesn't get into the fraternity he wanted. Now he can't seem to concentrate on anything. He wonders if maybe he doesn't belong in college.

Or consider Mary, a sophomore. She is well known on campus, dates often, has above average grades, but recently she finds herself uneasy, on edge, and critical of everyone, including her parents and closest friends.

Obstacles like these arise for all students. Illnesses are natural, so are problems. But for







Handling 39,149 prescriptions last year, the pharmacy operates at no cost to students. At left, Dr. Duane Varbie talks with an under-classman who came to the Mental Hygiene Clinic to "talk out" a pressure problem. Below, Mrs. Roger Gee, head physical therapist, supervises muscle-building exercises.





some they multiply and become a dominant part of their existence. The student can't see any solutions. His education suffers.

Where can a student go? Who will take care of him — mend his illnesses and lend an understanding ear? At home, there were always parents to talk things over with, a family doctor for the flu and colds, one's minister and close friends. If there was an academic problem, there was probably a high school advisor or close teacher. People were guiding the student then, in some cases directing most of what he did. But away from home, colleges and universities expect a student to think on his own. He looks at his friends in the dorm or fraternity, but they often seem too busy with their own problems. He looks to his teachers, but wonders if they have time to talk to individuals. Where does he turn?

The answer at Columbia is the Student Health Service. Most colleges and universities have health clinics with professional doctors who diagnose the student's sicknesses, prescribe medicine, and sometimes bed rest in an infirmary.

But in each school, the size varies and the services differ. "I feel ours is one of the best student clinics in the country," Dr. William R. Galeota, director, says. The clinic, which began in 1913, has been recognized for its facilities, staff, and available total service for many years by the Joint Commission on Hospital Accreditation. "It is rather unusual for a university clinic to receive such an honor," Galeota says.

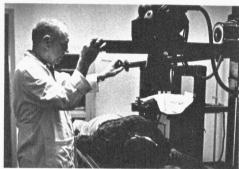
Besides the nine professional medical doctors, all who have from 15 to 22 years of private practice, there are consultants who are permanent members of the staff, including an ear, nose and throat man, an athletic specialist, an orthopedic surgeon, a roentgenologist, and a consulting psychiatrist. In addition, consultants from the University Medical Center and private Columbia doctors are on call to cover any need in every specialty.

Last year 5588 X rays were taken, 23,721 laboratory tests made, 8232 physical therapy treatments given, and 39,049 outpatient prescriptions from the pharmacy filled. The clinic is one of three stations in the state that administers yellow fever prevention shots and





A game of Scrabble—and pretty Joyce Thea—help student clinic patient Stanley Arky to forget his broken ankle.



was one of the first health clinics in the country to give pre-exposure active rabies immunization. In addition the clinic has a highly effective mental hygiene clinic, provides ambulance service, has bed space for 75, and has 101 paid employees.

But figures really aren't important to the sick student, the lonely freshman, or the student in trouble. What many people do not know, including students, is that the Student Health Service is more than a place to cure them of physical illnesses.

"What may appear as an innocuous difficulty to doctors elsewhere is recognized as possibly a more difficult problem by our people," Galeota says. "We specialize in young people's psychology." The doctors truly understand the pressures of college life. They deal only with students, in contrast to a family doctor. And the student, who may ask for any doctor and often continues to see him throughout his years here, establishes a very definite doctor-patient relationship.

But the truly personalized care that is given is rarely known. Anything a student tells a doctor is kept strictly confidential. And in the 71,811 visits to the clinic last year, there were other things reported besides routine colds, sprained ankles, measles, broken arms, and mononucleosis.

"A day never goes by without some problem being referred to us," Galeota says. He told of a girl who, planning to be married in June, found she was pregnant. "She wants me to talk to her boyfriend. I told her I'd meet with them any time, even Saturday or Sunday." This is the personalized care, the concern and the understanding that is never known because the information never goes beyond the doctor.



“... we do understand and care.”

“We are both ethically and legally bound to keep material confidential. The only time we give out information is with the student’s signed permission.” Galeota says. This also applies to the University: “If I call a dean and say Suzie isn’t well and I’m sending her home, there are never any questions asked.”

General cases of sickness are treated with a couple days rest in the clinic. Last year there were 3574 hospital patients, an average of 20 a day. “Our admission policy is quite conservative,” Galeota says. “If a student wants to go to bed, we put him in bed.” It’s no fun to be sick, but the clinic tries to make the student’s stay as comfortable as possible. They supply cards, games, phones in the hall, and soft drink dispensers on each floor with visiting hours in the afternoon and evening. Nurses are on 24-hour duty and the student’s particular doctor, who admitted him to the clinic, checks on him at least once a day.

But all cases are not solved by putting a student in bed, giving him medicine, and doctor attention. The problems of inner conflicts and those of socialization need the direction of trained psychologists. Therefore the Mental Hygiene Clinic was established more than 25 years ago with the prime purpose of stimulating new learning and personal growth in the student.

“We try to bring more alternatives into their lives,” Dr. Alvin Landfield, director of the Mental Hygiene Clinic, says. “This is what the good stimulating professor does. He offers more routes to solutions and new ways of thinking.” The 600 students that go to the hygiene clinic a year, approximating 4000 visits, are not severely disturbed, but their personal and social problems are keeping them from properly studying.

It is the job of four clinical psychologists and nine Ph.D. candidates in clinical psychology to help these students who come in to talk, unload their problems, and seek advice and understanding. “Generally speaking, I would say that 75 per cent of the students we see have received some important assistance,” Landfield says.

But there are always some students who may find the hygiene clinic disagreeable or feel they were sufficiently helped on the first visit. No pressure is put on them to return. By the same token, if they feel there is a personality conflict between themselves and the interviewer they may at any time change interviewers. Usually the clinic tries to fit the student to the psychotherapist.

The student and psychologist make the decision as to the number of meetings that are necessary, the average being five or six visits. The first one, the “intake interview,” is a 15-to-30 minute session to get a general notion of the problem. A pamphlet to explain the workings of the mental hygiene clinic to students says: “In a relaxed atmosphere the student is encouraged to talk about himself, his relationships with other people, and important events in his life. The psychologist and student develop a working relationship in which the student may come up with new ideas concerning his problems and ways of handling them.” A strict schedule is not observed but 50 minutes are usually allowed for the remaining interviews.

Sure, student problems sometimes stem from the fact that the campus seems so overwhelming, but it is comforting to know, as Dr. Galeota says, that “in spite of our largeness, we do understand and care.” □