

Psychological Issues in Performing Arts Medicine

"Things are seldom what they seem . . ."

With the start of MPPA's fifth year of publication, it seems appropriate and timely to try out some variations of format, which is what we are doing with this focused issue on "Psychological Issues in Performing Arts Medicine." There are both advantages and disadvantages to devoting an entire issue to a single subject. In its favor are that (1) it serves to emphasize the importance of the subject; (2) it provides a way to expose varying and sometimes conflicting points of view; (3) it may help point out directions for future investigation; and (4) it provides a forum for discussion. The possible negative side must also be mentioned. In this issue MPPA's focus on some psychological issues in performing arts medicine cannot be all-encompassing, either in subject matter or in schools of thought. Were we dealing with a far less complicated and controversial subject, this task would still be impossible, and this is simply not our intent.

The articles presented are a small and somewhat random sample of the total picture, but they are representative of the broad-based concerns about psychological issues in the performing arts. At times both artists and thera-

pists mistakenly assume that the principal psychological issue is performance anxiety. Performance anxiety is simply a manifestation of psychological problems and cannot be discussed appropriately in isolation. (Hence the above quote from Gilbert and Sullivan's "Patience": "Things are seldom what they seem, skim milk masquerades as cream.") There are reasons for treating symptoms, but that may or may not solve the underlying problem. As a corollary, despite the similarity of psychological and psychophysiological symptoms, the pathologic sources from which they stem cannot necessarily be equated. Each symptom of every person must be evaluated within the context of that individual's psychological makeup.

Whether the subject under discussion is performance anxiety, or another psychologically based symptom, by definition we are dealing with individual's feelings. Any consideration of emotional issues automatically becomes charged with the discussant's own feelings, which, while inevitable, tends to distract from the issues under discussion. Rather than being detrimental in and of itself, disagreement can be both healthy and productive. How-

ever, when immersed in these discourses, it is critical that the participants be vigilant in order to separate their own feelings and experiences from the subject at hand.

Those who are familiar with the performing arts recognize the multiplicity of associated stresses. Although I deplore the term (although not the concept) "holistic medicine," the medical problems that are the core subject of MPPA must be viewed in all their dimensions. The potential for psychological stress to affect the overall health of performers is so great that all of us concerned with their well-being must be thoroughly familiar with the psychological as well as the physiological risk factors.

We hope our readers will find this focused issue helpful and, above all, stimulating. It is not intended to be the last word on the many and complex psychological issues that are an integral part of the performing arts, but rather should serve as a demonstration of their diversity and importance. This issue is intended to provoke thoughts and discussions from which will be derived greater understanding.

Alice G. Brandfonbrener, M.D.