Karl Augustus Menninger 1893–1990 Am. psychiatrist

Summary Article: Menninger, Karl
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Karl Menninger, MD, one of the most influential figures in American psychiatry, cofounded The Menninger Clinic in Topeka, Kansas, in 1925 with his father C. F., and his brother Will. At a time when mentally ill persons were regularly institutionalized, Dr Menninger espoused the belief that even custodial patients in asylums were treatable. His pioneering efforts had remarkable results and his clinic swiftly came to the nation’s attention as a premier treatment center.

Writing The Human Mind in 1930, the best-selling, plainly written book successfully explained Freud and psychiatry to a curious and grateful American lay public. Thereafter, over a lifetime of teaching, lectures, speeches, published books, chapters and papers, Dr Karl, as he was known, demystified psychotherapy and psychoanalysis, while advocating the belief that there was hope for every individual who struggled with mental illness.

Along with cofounders, he set up the world's largest center for psychiatric training, the Karl Menninger School of Psychiatry & Mental Health Sciences, which trained as many as 100 residents per year shortly after World War II. During his lifetime he championed the rights of children and Native Americans, proposed prison reform, and vehemently opposed war.

Over the course of his long career in medicine, he came to be known in some circles as the “dean of American psychiatry.” A prolific writer and a dynamic speaker, Dr Karl's ability to capture a thought with a pithy comment or render an insight in a few brief words, reflected a sharp, and often witty, mind. Some of his oft-repeated and revealing quotes include:

Love cures people – both the ones who give it and the ones who receive it.
The central purpose of each life should be to dilute the misery in the world.
Hope is an adventure, a going forward, a confident search for a rewarding life.
One does not fall into love: one grows into love, and love grows in him.

Above all, Dr Karl was not a shrinking violet and said what he thought. Believing that hope was a vital part of the healing process, Dr Karl took his own profession to task in his famous 1959 presidential address to the American Psychiatric Association in which he deplored the lack of scientific attention to hope as a key in treating mental illness. Later studies affirmed Dr Karl's lifelong belief that instilling hope in patients produced favorable outcomes.

Dr Karl died July 18, 1990, four days short of his 97th birthday, the last cofounder to pass away. The Menninger Clinic continues to operate in Houston, Texas, where it is affiliated with Baylor College of Medicine and The Methodist Hospital. The Clinic's adopted slogan is “Discovering hope, one life at a time,” words that echo Karl Menninger’s beliefs.

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