

Obituary
Alfred M. Freedman, M.D.



Alfred Freedman was an enthusiastic psychiatric educator and community leader willing to challenge public perceptions and prejudices. He received his M.D. from the University of Minnesota in 1941, a stint in Army service when he studied the effects of anticholinergic drugs with Harold Himwich, residencies in child psychiatry at Bellevue Hospital in New York with Lauretta Bender, and graduation from the William Alanson White Institute of Psychoanalysis, he took on the chairmanship of the Department of Psychiatry at New York Medical College in 1960. It was from this base that he levered the psychiatric world from its self-centered Freudian enthusiasm to caring for the less favored -- the homosexual, the addicted, women, and the imprisoned.

Lacking adequate clinical facilities and finding that the Federal government was supporting new psychiatric treatment facilities, he organized the first Community Mental Health Center in New York City. When a crisis in marijuana and heroin abuse challenged New York City, he established a drug addiction unit for adults at the Metropolitan Hospital followed quickly by a second for adolescents.

He broadened the medical school psychiatric teaching program to all four years. Seeing the need for an eclectic textbook he developed the *Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry*, a work that has been repeatedly updated and translated into many languages. He added a flexible program for women psychiatrists to the residency training to assure their Board certification in whatever period of time required by family issues.

His activity in psychiatric organizations quickly led to the presidencies of the American Psychopathological Association in 1971, the American College of Neuropsychopharmacology in 1972, and the American Psychiatric Association in 1973. During his APA tenure he supported gay-rights efforts to destigmatize homosexuality as a mental disease. He led the APA Trustees to exclude homosexuality as a psychiatric disease in the nomenclature.

He established narcotic detoxification and methadone substitution programs and encouraged the search for effective narcotic antagonists. Assays of cyclazocine, naloxone, naltrexone, and LAAM showed the limitations of these approaches, but the demonstration that naloxone was quickly effective in relieving an opiate stupor led to its widespread adoption as the standard treatment in emergency rooms.

When the narcotic crisis in New York encompassed cannabis, he organized a cross-national study of cannabis and hashish in Athens finding that hashish use induced tolerance and dependence, but neither the connection to psychosis, nor to brain damage by EEG and neuropsychologic tests could be confirmed.

His interests were international. He became an active member of the CINP in 1960. At the APA he organized a visit to the Soviet Union to examine allegations that dissidents were incarcerated in psychiatric hospitals and treated with antipsychotic drugs. At the College he established an annual lectureship for leading international psychiatrists. After Fritz Freyhan died, he became a member of the jury of the Anna Monika Foundation. In these international efforts he was strongly encouraged by his wife Marcia, a labor economist.

He retired from the New York Medical College in 1988, and instead of assuming the role of senior citizen he turned his attention to the role of psychiatry in death penalty cases. He sought to prevent psychiatrists from testifying to the sanity of prisoners or to prescribing drugs to normalize psychosis so that they could be executed.

On his death he left his wife Marcia of 68 years, two sons and three grandchildren.

Freedman A.M. Almost fifty years in psychopharmacology: A memoir. In: T. Ban, D. Healy, E. Shorter (Eds): *The Triumph of Psychopharmacology and the Story of CINP*. Budapest: Animula Publishing, 2000:261-4.

Grimes W. Alfred Freedman, a Leader in Psychiatry, Dies at 94. *The New York Times* 21 April 2011, pg A25.

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