
Please read on whether or not you are interested in mental retardation. This book provides interesting and provocative personal information for everyone as well as for those health professionals working with retarded/handicapped/disabled persons.

The personal basis of the book shows up in the first paragraph of the Foreword: “The future is exciting—frightening—and demanding! As social and economic change accelerates at an ever-increasing rate, we look with awe and wonder at the way in which unanticipated events impact on our lives and change the way we live. We are also frightened about how well we will adapt to the demands of a world that may be structured quite differently from the familiar environment of today.”

The President’s Committee on Mental Retardation (PCMR), created by President Lyndon Johnson and directed to report each year to the President on recommendations for action related to mental retardation, called upon futurists to analyze and forecast trends expected to affect mental retardation over the next two decades. The book reports on two conferences attended by futurists, whose “professional armamentarium includes a battery of tools and techniques to fathom the unfathomable”; mental retardation specialists; and PCMR members.

The book contains an introductory section that describes the PCMR, the nature of mental retardation, and futurist researchers and their methodologies. There are six chapters by futurist experts who speak of the future from their own disciplinary perspectives toward living and working in the year 2000, the impact of technological advances, the post-industrial society, and human survival needs. The chapters were originally papers presented at a second conference of futurists and mental retardation specialists after the first conference was held to acquaint participants with each others’ fields. The papers addressed questions formulated by the mental retardation specialists.

Among the disciplines represented by the authors were architecture, psychiatry, engineering, and business administration. These authors and other futurist researchers draw from science fiction, history, operations research, systems analysis, computer science, statistical sampling, and opinion sampling to help them to identify and separate masterable and dominating futures. Futurists believe that the future is in part shaped by determined actions that responsible people take today.

In the last chapter, Editor Plog summarizes and unifies the pertinent information in the six separate futurist papers to provide a perspective on the future of mental retardation. He makes forecasts of the year 2000 about general living conditions, the economy, work and leisure, government and the people, technology, psychology of the times, and the feeling that the PCMR will meet its goals for retarded persons. He also summarizes conference participants’ discussion of implications for mental retardation reduction in prevalence, public attitudes, full citizenship, opportunities for work, and humane services especially for mentally retarded persons but also for all needy persons.

Plog quotes one of the futurist comments that the studies reported were “designed to enhance the PCMR’s perception of potential changes, possible crises, and opportunities which can have a significant bearing on efforts in improving the mental retardation situation. The insight gained thereby will not eliminate uncertainty but should significantly facilitate ‘good risk’ planning decisions.”

Throughout the book a persistent theme crops up: neither the positive nor negative aspects expect to affect mentally retarded persons in the year 2000 will be specific to those who are mentally retarded but, rather, will affect all persons. This theme is evident as the futurists discuss biomedical advances, health care, human service systems, the job market, housing, attitudes toward minorities and deviancy of any sort, communications, education, family make-up, and other social aspects of society.

Examples of forecasts that are especially appropriate concerns for occupational therapists are housing/homing for all disabled persons, computer-assisted learning and other telecommunication components, possibility of multiple careers for all persons, the need for model programs for mentally retarded persons, and especially for programs that demonstrate the economic benefits of independent living and job training.

The chapter on social functioning of mankind from the stone age to the year 2000 by Gorney, a psychiatrist and psychosocial adaptation futurist, is especially recommended to occupational therapists.

The book is further recommended to all therapists for enhancement of their personal lives; 2. for their use in current and future planning for education, practice, and research activities; and 3. for adding related perspective to occupational therapy futures exploration, such as Occupational Therapy: 2001 AD reports of the task forces on social issues and target populations, and others.

Futures conferences and publications are becoming frequent occurrences, but this reviewer does not know of any other example focusing this amount of multidisciplinary attention on mental retardation or other disabling conditions.

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