

State Finds Quacks In Mental Therapy

By IVER PETERSON

A six-month investigation into the practices of unlicensed mental-health therapists by the State Attorney General, Louis J. Lefkowitz, has uncovered evidence of widespread "quackery," "sexual misconduct" and the deception of clients through the use of phony academic credentials and titles, it was reported yesterday.

A public hearing has been set for Dec. 15 "to expose these practices" by "unlicensed therapists and others purporting to practice as psychotherapists, psychoanalysts, hypnotists and marriage counselors," the Attorney General's office said.

Investigators from the Attorney General's Bureau of Consumer Fraud and Protection are

Continued on Page 64, Column 1

The New York Times

Published: December 7, 1972

Copyright © The New York Times

Lefkowitz Cities Wide 'Quackery' in Mental Therapy

Continued From Page 1, Col. 1

reported to have made "hundreds" of contacts with people in the growing, unlicensed mental-health field. The evidence was gathered through undercover visits to the clinics, telephone interviews, letters and complaints from former patients and a review of subpoenaed records and files from the clinics.

The findings, as charged by investigators, include the following:

¶Clients have been "bamboozled" by bogus degrees and titles used and displayed by therapists.

¶A "great deal of sexual interplay" is routinely imposed on women clients in the name of therapy by male practitioners.

¶Hard-sell techniques, similar to the representations made by some dance-lesson studies, are used to entice patients into paying for training as therapists themselves.

¶Patients are encouraged to immerse themselves in the "therapy" by forsaking friends and contacts outside the therapy group. This has resulted in broken marriages and neglected medical and psychiatric problems.

¶The parents of several youthful psychotherapy clients have offered to pay the thera-

pists to "release" their children from the programs.

Assistant Attorney General Stephen Mindell said it was impossible to estimate the total number of unlicensed psychotherapy clinics throughout the state, but he said they numbered in the hundreds. Profits from the operations, derived from fees that frequently match those of state-licensed psychiatrists and psychologists, amount to "hundreds of thousands of dollars a year," he said.

Mr. Mindell said the investigation began last spring following disclosures by The New York Times that a growing number of persons holding honorary or mail-order doctoral degrees, or certificates from unaccredited institutions were entering the mental-health field as therapists in the state, particularly in the city.

Only the titles of psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers are protected by a state licensing law. There are no legal restrictions on the use of such titles as "psychotherapist," "group therapist" and "psychoanalyst." Therefore, Mr. Mindell pointed out, the Attorney General's investigation has concentrated on those aspects of the practice that involve deception or unfair practices toward the consumer—in this case, the therapy clients.

"The public is being bam-

boozled by this phony credentialism, these self-accredited individuals who call themselves 'doctor,' although they don't have any educational background whatsoever," Mr. Mindell said.

His investigators reported visiting clinics that had hung more than a dozen degrees, achievement awards and honorary titles on the walls. He cited one honorary degree from the "London Institute for Applied Research"; it is advertised for sale for \$25 in the magazine for Diner's Club members.

"We can say," Mr. Mindell went on, "there exists a pattern among male therapists and young female patients whereby the therapist informs the patient that in order for her to work out her problems, she should engage in sexual activities with him. Women have reported to us that they were solicited to engage in sexual contacts all the time, as part of their therapy.

"Ironically, they were still being charged for it."

Letters to the Attorney Gen-

eral also disclosed that patients were made to sever contacts with the world outside the group-therapy clinics, which were frequently referred to as "the community."

"People uniformly complain that they are told to disengage themselves completely from their families and any personal friends," Mr. Mindell said. "They're told that their only friends are the therapists and the other clients. The 'community' becomes their whole life—not figuratively, but literally their whole life."

One of the investigators reported that one clinic required its clients to "check in" each day before and after work to say "hello." A former client at another clinic recently told a reporter that men who were classified as "spendthrifts" were required to deposit their pocket money with the therapist and to draw an allowance each day.

"These people preach freedom to their patients," Mr. Mindell said, "but they impose their own authoritarian relations. They tell them if they leave

the 'community,' they'll crack up, they won't be able to handle it."

A consequence of this strong bond, he said, is that clients often fail to seek timely medical or psychiatric attention when it is needed. Some cases have been uncovered in which former clients of the practitioner were committed to mental institutions, Mr. Mindell said.

In the "hard sell," Mr. Mindell asserted, the clinics would promise investigators, posing as potential customers, that "there's no problem they can't solve." The investigation also disclosed that some patients were told after a while that they were so good they should train as therapists themselves, at extra cost.

Clients were found to be spending about \$200 a month for their treatments.

The findings will be made public at the Dec. 15 hearing in Room 637 of the State Building, 80 Centre Street in lower Manhattan. Mr. Lefkowitz said yesterday that "all interested parties" were invited to attend and speak at the hearing.