

OBITUARY

Professor Michael Shepherd 1923–1995

Michael Shepherd, professor em. for epidemiological psychiatry and former chairman of the Department of Psychological Medicine at the Institute of Psychiatry (London) suddenly died on August 21st, 1995. His profound and intensive influence on the re-establishment and spread of epidemiological psychiatry in Europe and elsewhere after World War II remains unsurpassed by any of its contemporaries' contributions to this field.

Michael Shepherd was the eldest son of a family of Russian origin. His many talents already became visible during his school years. Later, he studied medicine in Oxford where he met Prof. John Ryle, a pioneer in social medicine and the first professor in this field in Oxford. During this period he learned about the influence of social factors on health and became familiar with the epidemiological methodology. As a psychiatrist he was also much influenced by Prof. Aubrey Lewis at the Maudsley in London. Aubrey Lewis supported this talented student and opened him the way to become the first professor for epidemiological psychiatry in Europe.

Prof. Shepherd carried out exemplary epidemiological studies of mental disorders in general practice, studied the natural history of mental illnesses and dealt with fundamental psychopharmacological topics and various methodological problems in psychiatry. He made important contributions to the development and revision of definitions and the categorisation of mental disorders and played a crucial role in the WHO Programme on Epidemiology and Classification. He was an excellent teacher with high expectations and a profound knowledge not only in the mental health field but also in other areas of epidemiology, social and clinical medicine. His students from all corners of the globe who experienced their often rather expensive professional training at the Institute of Psychiatry remember his critical questions and comments with a slight shiver. But all of them admired and honoured their teacher. When Prof. Shepherd was on a visit in some part of the world it was always impressive to see that many of the best experts, particularly in epidemiological psychiatry and in leading WHO positions, had received a major

influence with regard to psychiatric epidemiology but also in personal aspects from him and that he was deeply respected by them.

Prof. Shepherd was extraordinarily erudite and had many different interests. He spoke four foreign languages and had a vast knowledge of the belletristic and philosophical literature of his own country but also of German and French authors. In the last years the focus of his interest concentrated on the personal history and the background of leading psychiatrists. He published a volume entitled "Psychiatrists on Psychiatry" which contains the biographies and views on psychiatry of leading contemporary psychiatrists from different countries and was translated into eight different languages. His last very personal and critical analysis of an outstanding personality within psychiatry was on Emil Kraepelin. It was published in 1995 in a Special Issue of the *European Archives of Psychiatry and Clinical Neuroscience* on "Emil Kraepelin and the 20th Century Psychiatry".

A certain sense of dissatisfaction with the limited scope and narrow concepts particularly of US-American scientific journals led him to the foundation of *Psychological Medicine* in 1970. Under his editorship it gained a good reputation for its openness toward theoretical, historical and philosophical aspects of psychiatric subjects and its high scientific standard and it developed into a unique and most successful journal.

Owing to his poignant and sometimes caustic humor Prof. Shepherd was estimated by most of his colleagues, although sensitive persons sometimes felt scared. Behind his never-melting reserve and his extremely well-formulated sentences (it was always a pleasure to listen to his excellent Oxford-style English) he was of great sensitivity and kindness. With him we have lost one of Europe's paramount representatives of psychiatry as well as an erudite and estimated personality.

Heinz Häfner