

Researching the Unresearchable!

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his is certainly the research decade in the psychosocial rehabilitation and community support field. More research, more rigorous research, and more outcome research, are and will continue to be the shibboleths of many meetings and conferences.

However, the question must be asked as to whether or not everything in this field is researchable. Perhaps this is the time to reflect on what is not researchable. For this writer it is easy to pinpoint the most unresearchable topic. Whether or not people with severe mental illness should have the opportunity for community support and rehabilitation services is not researchable. Either we as a people value and believe in the opportunity for rehabilitation and community support for people with psychiatric disability or we don't. It is a question of values and not data. It is a choice based on humanism and not empiricism.

This is not to argue that research is not critical to the development of the community support and psychiatric rehabilitation field. It certainly is. However, once we have committed ourselves to the value of rehabilitation, the research questions become how can we do rehabilitation most effectively and efficiently, and not whether or not we should provide the opportunity for rehabilitation.

Even in this age of empiricism there are still values and ideas in this country that are not subject to research. Consider the Declaration of Independence and the famous lines: “. . . that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.” This statement is not open to research, nor should it be. Either we as a country believe in these lines or we don't. Scientific data were not relevant to these lines when they were written nor will it be data that ever erase these lines. It is not yet an oxymoron, even in this time of science, to have true beliefs, beliefs more basic, more fundamental than data itself.

So we need to be careful when we respond to this decade's clarion call for community support and psychosocial rehabilitation outcome research. It is not the concept itself that is on the research table. Rather, it is how to better implement the concept. We must be careful to make this discrimination and insure that others are making it also.

The opportunity for people with psychiatric disability to avail themselves of rehabilitation has been long in coming relative to the opportunities for people with physical disabilities. The concept has arrived and it is not because of research data. Like the framers of the Declaration of Independence, people in the community support and psychosocial rehabilitation field believe this basic belief to be “self-evident.” To research the unresearchable should be unthinkable.