Introduction to the Special Issue

**EVALUATION AND REFORM IN SERVICE SYSTEMS FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES AND MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS**

**JOAN B. BEASLEY, PH.D., LMHC¹**

¹Private Consultant, Chestnut Hill, MA

This special issue of Mental Health Aspects of Developmental Disabilities presents guidelines to effective services, evaluation and systems reform with regard to services for individuals with developmental disabilities and mental health needs. Severe declines in revenue to federal, state and local governments, as well as cuts in Medicaid, Medicare and other third party reimbursement have resulted in the immediate need to consider service systems change in order to maximize the effectiveness of existing resources. In addition, recent court decisions in support of the rights of individuals with coexisting developmental disabilities and mental health needs to have appropriate services must be considered in the service reform process. There is great waste, both financial and social, associated with ineffective services. In this special edition, our goal is to provide expert analysis of clinical, programmatic, legal, policy and planning strategies to improve services, thereby increasing the effectiveness of resources expended.

All of the articles in this issue are intended to assist the reader to evaluate their current systems of care. Attorney Deborah Dorfman and Legal Advocate Craig Awmiller present an important analysis of commonly cited barriers that prevent persons with a dual diagnosis of mental illness and developmental disabilities from receiving effective care and treatment. In addition, they discuss the legal rights for these individuals to have treatment while in institutional settings as well as their right to supports and services in the community. The authors conclude their analysis with a discussion of the role of experts in the “right to treatment” litigation.

Kathryn duPree, Assistant Deputy Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Mental Retardation, and I describe trends found in several community service systems in the U.S., and the strategic plan implemented by the State of Connecticut based on their self-evaluation process.

In the third article in this issue, Mark Fleisher, M.D. describes psychiatric standards of care and best practices in a non-acute care setting. Finally, with regard to long term care in congregate settings, William Gardner, Ph.D. and Richard Hunter, Ph.D. provide a comprehensive overview of best practices in inpatient psychiatric facilities for persons with mental retardation. Although not addressed specifically in this issue, we would be remiss if we did not mention the need to research evaluation, service and programmatic strategies including those described here, to better establish reliable and valid clinical practice and standards of care.

I would like to extend a special thanks to Dr. John Jacobson and Dr. William Gardner for their assistance in editing this special edition, and to Anne Hurley, Maggie Zwilling and Linda Vollmoeller for their unwavering patience and support. A major goal of this special issue is to promote analysis and discussion toward positive service reforms. We welcome your comments.