

Peruvians learn mental health

An Oakland University instructor has found that one person can make a difference, even when it means trying to change the ways of an entire country.

Jeffrey Kotler, a visiting professor of counseling in the School of Human and Educational Services and Farmington Hills psychiatrist, is teaching modern psychotherapy to psychiatrists and psychologists in Peru. His goal is to introduce mental health counseling to enable more Peruvians to receive the care they need.

Kotler began his work from August 1985 to this past January under a Fulbright scholarship. His lecture series in Lima was so successful that the Fulbright Program board and the three universities he visited requested that he return.

Kotler will go back to Peru during the final two weeks of November for an unprecedented continuation of his scholarship. Ordinarily, Fulbright scholars are limited to funding only once every five years.

While in Peru, Kotler gave lectures to about half of the country's mental health care professionals. The response was "overwhelming," Kotler says. Kotler aims to help Peruvians establish a preventive mental health care system. That would contrast with the present system of providing mental health care only for the rich and for those identified as "sick and psychotic," he says. In relation to the U.S., Peru is 15-20 years behind in acceptance of mental health care programs, Kotler estimates.

Setting up counseling programs has several barriers to overcome. One, Kotler says, is acquainting Peru's psychiatrists and psychologists with the purpose of counseling. Another is convincing Peruvians that talking to a "stranger" is acceptable when solving personal problems.

Peruvians rarely go outside the family for personal guidance, but when they do, Kotler says, the family priest

is more than likely the first choice. "In Peru, families serve much the same function as counselors do here," he says. "The family is so strong in Latin cultures. That's why I ran into so much resistance."

The intent of Kotler's trip was to stimulate interest in helping those excluded from mental health care. "I was training people to work for the hospitals and community agencies to work with the Indian populations, the homeless, the poor people."

DESPITE SOME opposition, Kotler sees a chance to succeed.

"There is an opportunity to make a difference," he says, noting the headway he already has made. "I introduced the concept of group therapy to Peru."

During his second trip to Lima, Kotler will continue his research into therapeutic techniques of Andean witch doctors, lecture about the status of U.S. family counseling programs and be a consultant to hospitals and mental health care centers.

Kotler learned of the Peruvian trip four years ago and was accepted two years later. The commission established the purpose of the trip, but Kotler



Jeffrey Kotler

devised his own lecture topics. He was the only psychiatrist in the world selected to do the work. Six others went to Peru with Kotler, but their specializations were in other fields.

Kotler is a 1972 OU graduate. He did his post-graduate work at Harvard University, the University of Stockholm, Wayne State University and the University of Virginia, from which he received his doctorate. He is also director of Woodcreek Clinic in Farmington Hills.

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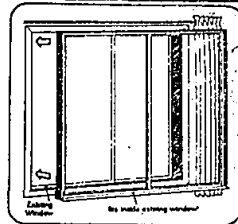
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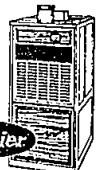
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