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North Carolina Department of  
Correction  
Division of Prisons  
Mental Health Services

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# Your Mental Health Newsletter

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## Dr. Tom Owens Chief Psychiatrist and Mental Health Director

by Leon Morrow

The new Chief Psychiatrist and Mental Health Director for the Division of Prisons, Thomas D. Owens, M.D., is a self-described visionary who wants staff to know that he “was raised in New Orleans.”

When interviewed for this article Dr. Owens identified two times that the luck of the draw influenced his life. He drew number ten in *THE LOTTERY*—the one that was such a part of the lives of those of us who came of age during the Viet Nam era. He immediately joined the Air Force and became a clerk typist. He was eventually assigned to Canada where he honed the French language skills he initially learned at home in New Orleans to a functional level.



Dr. Tom Owens, MD

This helped in a special military assignment associated with the French Separatist movement in Quebec. Military officials became concerned about certain weaponry stored in Canada, and the possibility that

some individuals might wish to have the weapons. After helping deal with this problem he received an Honorable Discharge as a Staff Sergeant (E-5) in 1976.

Tom completed school at the University of Colorado (B.A. 1981) and the LSU School of Medicine (M.D. 1985) before the second unexpected event redirected his life. This happened while he was a resident at Duke with thoughts of developing a practice in child psychiatry. While working as a contractual psychiatrist at NCCCW (now NCCIW), he was named

in a lawsuit by inmate Betsy Kelly of the well known Little Rascals Day care case. She sued him as an

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individual for his psychiatric treatment and she sued the DOC. He found his experience in court to be so gratifying and so professionally rewarding that he immediately redirected his energy into forensic psychiatry.

In addition to certification by the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology in Psychiatry (1991), Dr. Owens is certified in Forensic Psychiatry (1996). He has testified in court cases more than 50 times. He has consulted as a psychiatrist at Odom C.I. (1987-88), at NCCCW (1987-90), and at Fountain CCW (1992-93). He was a staff psychiatrist with the Federal Bureau of Prison at FCI—Butner (1990-98) before taking his current position. One of the papers he has presented reflects his interests in forensic psychiatry. That paper is:

“Owens, T. D. (1989, August). *Neonaticide and Failures of Attachment*. In S. A. Kiefer (Chair), Developmental Antecedents of Women Who Kill. Symposium conducted at the 97th Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association, New Orleans, La.

His professional memberships include, among others, the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law, and the American Medical Athletic Association.

Tom is married to the former, DOP Chief Nurse, Julie Whittlesey. They have four daughters. It is assumed that his experience with the Betsy Kelly lawsuit, his work at FCCW, NCCIW, and with the five females in his family only had a little influence on his deci-



Dr. Tom Owens and Dr. Randy Palmer

sion to work with a predominantly male prison system.

At the time Dr. Owens accepted the job as Chief Psychiatrist and Mental Health Director in May 1998, the Raleigh area media were vocal, if inaccurate, in their criticism of the DOP mental health delivery system. Because of the information in the media, he was concerned that he would find problems that needed to be fixed. He said that he has been pleasantly surprised at the high quality of people and programs that Al Harrop (the previous Director) had put in place. He is also amazed at the extent of pathology among the inmates in treatment. He had thought many would be “the walking worried,” but has found the mental health beds filled with seriously ill individuals. Some of his goals for the Mental Health system can be found in an article about the November 4, 1998 Mental Health Program Managers meeting presented elsewhere in this newsletter.

One way to understand Dr. Owens is to recognize that he did not ask for a draft number of ten, but when he received it he responded with creativity, vision and wisdom. He was surprised by the lawsuit filed against him while working at NCCIW, but when it occurred he found so much pleasure in the new challenge that he revised his career. We can expect him to skillfully handle the unique and unexpected challenges in this agency (including those he did not know about when he took the job) and successfully guide NCDOP Mental Health services into the new millennium.



Dr. Owens and Leon Morrow

## “How Many Hats Can a Psychologist Wear?”

By Susanna Jarvis

Well, if you're Bob Phillips, Ph.D, the answer is definitely more than one!! In fact, the count is now up to three. As you know, Bob has served as the Psychological Program Coordinator (now known as Mental Health Assistant Director) in the Piedmont Region for many years. His newest hat identifies him as the Assistant Director of Mental Health and Chief Psychologist. The title for this latest position may soon be changed to Deputy Director of Mental Health. For now, most folks are affectionately referring to him as “Deputy Bob.”

What does all this mean? Bob will continue to provide supervision for Brown Creek Correctional Institution plus all the units in the Piedmont region except for Morrison Youth Institution, which will be covered by Keith Noles, Ph.D., who is the Mental Health Assistant Director for the South Central Region. As Mental Health Assistant Director, he will approve interns, review mental health job applications and sort them according to their level of qualifications, handle all MH contractual positions (except psychiatrists), review risk assessments for the state, and, in the future, provide supervision for the other MH Assistant Directors. This enthusiastic traveler is now working out of the Raleigh office at least one day a week and has embraced technological innovations like the pager and cellular phone. Bob summed up his new duties with the word “factotum”, defined by Webster as “a person hired to do all sorts of work; a handy man.”

Deputy Bob's vision for the future is to begin better utilizing staff members' individual talents/ interests on a statewide level. In fact, that is how your current newsletter staff came to be involved with this project. Any of you who know Bob, also know that he frequently speaks about wanting a happy staff. He hopes to facilitate that goal by doing a little “fine-tuning” and eliminating small irritations.

This talented individual was born in 1939 in

Stevenson, Washington. Bob completed his undergraduate work at Whitman College in Walla Walla, WA; during his sophomore year he realized that he was enjoying the reading in his psychology elective more than his chemical engineering courses and decided that a change was indicated. This meant turning down an engineering scholarship for his junior year! Even so, Bob decided

he'd “rather starve as a psychologist than be a rich chemical engineer!” His first professional job involved working as a staff psychologist with the Division of Youth Services at a diagnostic and reception center for juvenile offenders in Tacoma, WA. Bob earned his Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology in 1965 from the University of Washington and then worked for the next four years as an Assistant Professor at the University of Minnesota. During that time he also served as a consultant to the state criminal

justice system. Marriage to his wife Judy came in 1964 with daughter Megan arriving in 1969. Next, he worked as an Associate Professor, later promoted to Professor at Wells College in New York until 1980. Additional professional experiences during that period included working at Willard Psychiatric Center (state psychiatric hospital) and as a consulting psychologist at Auburn prison. In 1980, Bob had the great foresight to move to our wonderful state of North Carolina and was hired as the Psychological Program Coordinator for the Western region. His personal interests include - “CARS, period!”, as well as reading *about* cars and psychology, and traveling. And, that folks, is “the rest of the story” in how Deputy Bob came to be where he is today.

We are thankful for the wisdom he showed in making that life-changing decision his sophomore year and extend our heartfelt congratulations on his new position! Thankfully, we will continue to learn from and be entertained by this extravert for at least until the year 2004. That's when Bob says he plans to retire and buy a RV, travel and spend winters at his condo in Hilton Head. Hats off to you, Deputy Bob, for the journey you've taken us on and the places you'll lead us to; we know it will be a memorable ride!!



Dr. Bob Phillips



## MH Program Managers' Meeting

by Leon Morrow

On November 4, 1998 the Mental Health Program Managers met for a day of sharing information, planning for the future, and as an opportunity to express appreciation to Dr. Al Harrop. An excellent lunch was catered by Phyllis Elliott. Several special guests came including Dr. Harrop and the Director of Prisons, Dan Stieneke. Mr. Stieneke expressed formal appreciation to Dr. Harrop, Terry Penny, and other members of his staff who are leaving the Division to work in the office of the Department of Correction. Staff showed sincere appreciation to Al for all he has meant to Mental Health in the Division by giving him a three minute standing ovation.

During the meeting, Dr. Tom Owens outlined some of the plans he has developed. These plans reflect appreciation for the existing system while establishing a vision of "user friendly" improvements. For example, the Mental Health Procedures Manual (the "Gray Book") will be rewritten during the early part of 1999 to make it easier to reference and follow. Some other goals are the redesignation of the Deputy Director and Assistant



Phyllis Elliott recognizes Dr. Al Harrop

Director positions to be more compatible with DOP administrative nomenclature, to get all Mental Health Program Managers on the GroupWise E-mail system, establish a peer-review system, increase recognition of mental health accomplishments by releasing more information through the Public Relations Office, and move toward more use of electronic communications such as video-conferencing. Another, more specific goal is the upgrading of the mental health delivery system at CP by increasing funding and staffing.



Dr. Robert Phillips,  
Deputy Mental Health Director

## Spotlight on the New Polk Youth Institution

by Susanna Jarvis

After only approximately one year since its November 15, 1997 opening at the new Butner location, Polk Youth Institution is making headlines again. Institution staff are making final adjustments as they prepare for the full operation of the new "Hcon" or High Security Maximum Control unit, popularly known as the Supermax. In fact, one inmate was already settling into his new home at the time of this report in late November.

The Hcon unit is designed for housing those inmates who pose "an imminent threat to the life or health of other inmates or staff, or the total isolation of inmates that otherwise pose a more serious threat to the security and integrity of the prison facility." Inmates placed in Hcon may be: 1) guilty of a major disciplinary infraction such as assault, holding a hostage, or participating in a riot; 2) have expressed threats to the life of another or been in possession of a deadly weapon or illegal drugs while in maximum control; or, 3) be viewed as a possible threat by prison administration. This new unit has 96 single cells plus 4 observation cells. Inmates housed there spend 23 hours in their cells and earn various privileges through a level system, yet to be introduced. The facility is designed to prevent direct contact between inmates and staff; however, intensive case management and support from psychological and chaplaincy staff will be available.

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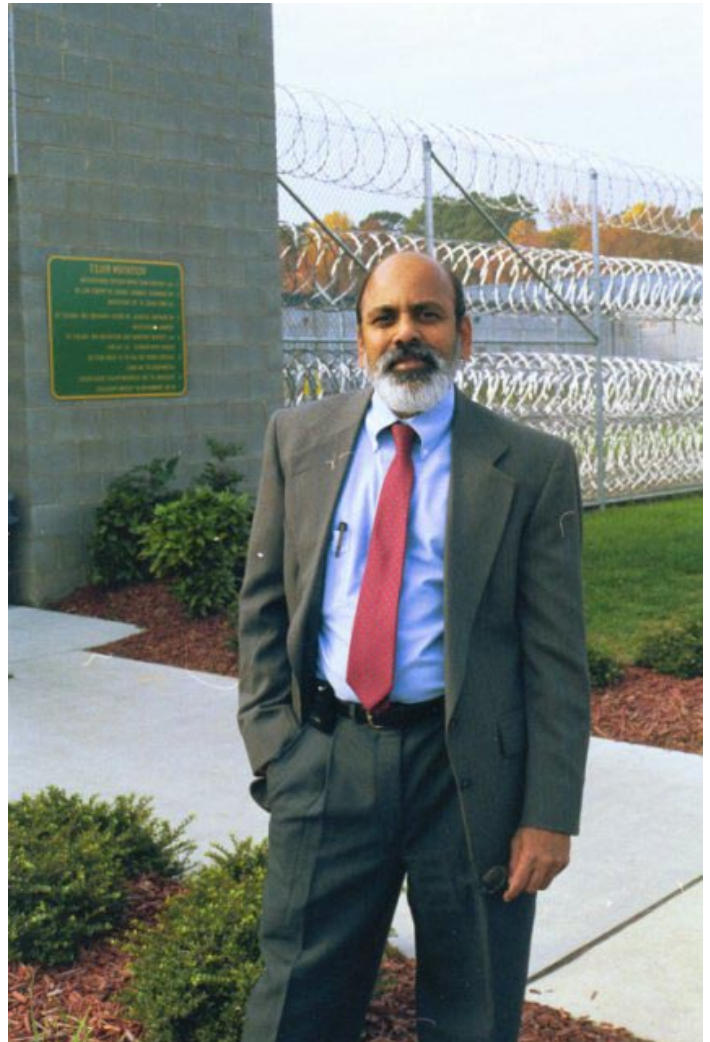
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The new policy dictates that no inmate with a serious mental disorder or severe mental retardation be assigned to Hcon unless approved by the Mental Health Director or his designee. This means that the mental health program manager/coordinator will complete a mental health evaluation on any inmate at their respective unit who is referred to Hcon; the evaluation will need to be completed within 5 working days of the referral request. Inmates will be excluded if they are actively psychotic, or if they have severe depression or mania; if there is insufficient current information to make a determination of the presence or absence of such symptoms, the clinician will be allowed 10 additional working days to obtain a current assessment. In addition, neither deaf nor wheelchair bound inmates can be accommodated at the Hcon unit.

Dr. Hanu Rao, Mental Health Program Manager, and his staff of 4 psychologists, 2 behavior specialists and 1 clerk are gearing up for the challenge of working with this unique population in addition to their other Polk responsibilities. One concern at this point is whether/how much Hcon inmates will create issues in order to get human contact via mental health staff, and how to appropriately respond to such situations.

Polk Youth Institution, as a whole, offers mental health staff a variety of treatment challenges. The institution houses approximately 850 other inmates in medium custody, which includes 350 served through the reception diagnostic center, a 144-cell segregation unit, and about 20 safekeepers. Inmates range in age from 19 to 21 years old and may participate in the usual gaintime positions, DART, school, or other programs like the Toastmasters. Mental health staff currently provide screenings, crisis management, testing, supportive counseling, individual and group therapy, oversee DD case management, etc. A relaxation group offered twice a week and a Life Challenges group designed to aid inmates in adjusting to the losses associated with incarceration have both been particularly popular.

Dr. Rao, with his approximately 24 years of association with the Department of Correction, finds value in the principles of Buddhist psychology and has been able to apply these occasionally in his work with select inmates. Specifically, he notes that Buddhism



Dr. Hanu Rao at PYI

teaches you to view and accept life as a whole - its wonderful parts along with all its faults - and to appreciate each individual for who they are. Furthermore, you learn not only to accept yourself, but befriend yourself. Dr. Rao uses the technique of mindfulness with clients to help them focus on the here and now, rather than be overwhelmed by all that is troubling them. One should learn “to see merit in the magnificent, as well as in the mundane aspects of life, without giving in to the childish demands of one’s ego.” Such principles can be useful no matter which side of the prison bars you live on!



Al Harrop talks with Don Wilson and John Vogler at his reception

## ***Readers' Corner***

Listed below are books recommended by fellow mental health staff for personal or professional reading. Feel free to send your submissions! We will try to make this a regular feature. Happy Reading!!

*Suggestions collected by Susanna Jarvis*

- 1) Richard Pallazza, Ph.D  
Mental Health Program Manager  
North Piedmont Area  
Cold Mountain by Charles Frazier  
This is a love story about a soldier's journey back home to his sweetheart at the end of the Civil War.
- 2) Leslie Quick, M.S.  
Staff Psychologist II  
Piedmont C. I.  
What You Can Change & What You Can't by Martin Seligman  
A good self-help book and great resource for assigned reading with clients in individual therapy.
- 3) Leslie Quick  
Toxic Parents: Overcoming Their Hurtful Legacy & Reclaiming Your Life by Susan Forward  
Good for working with clients who have been abused (physically, verbally or sexually).
- 4) Sandy Huffman, M.A.  
Staff Psychologist II  
Piedmont Area  
Wounded Boys, Heroic Men by Daniel Sonkin  
Excellent resource for working with survivors of childhood abuse.
- 5) Sandy Huffman  
Seven Habits of Highly Effective People by Stephen Covey  
Worthwhile reading for personal development. Sandy has used it in group therapy.
- 6) Bob Phillips, Ph.D  
Deputy Director for MH  
Sex on the Brain by Deborah Blum (ask Randy Palmer about it, also Leon Morrow thinks it is a great book )  
An overview on evolutionary psychology.

## **“Who’s Who in Mental Health at Polk Youth Institution”**

by Susanna Jarvis

The following information is provided to aid you in learning more about your mental health counterparts. Bet you find yourself saying more than once, “I didn’t know that; that’s neat!” An aim of this newsletter is to provide information while also encouraging professional/personal communication within our department.

Dr. Hanu Rao completed undergraduate work at Anodhra University in Southern India and then moved to the United States in 1972. He joined the DOC in 1974 when he began working as a psychologist with Probation & Parole. From 1975-'79, Hanu worked at the “old” Central Prison as a staff psychologist, serving both inpatient and outpatient inmates. He was later promoted to Psychological Program Manager and served the North Central Area. From 1981-'85, he worked part time on his Ph.D. at North Carolina State University (Go WOLFPACK!!). Dr. Rao then returned to the department and worked on contract as a psychologist at Caledonia and Odom. In 1989, he began contractual work at Blanch Youth Institution and remained there for the next three years, until coming to the “old” Polk Youth Institution full-time in January 1995. Hanu has one daughter who is studying acupuncture and Chinese medicine in Seattle, Washington; he and his wife are happily settling into their “new” home in the woods not far from Butner.

The rest of the Polk mental health staff (all heavyweights in their own right) include Staff Psychologists Rich Bruner, M.A. (Appalachian State University), Robert Harmon, M.A. (University of Missouri), Mary Snow, M.A. (N.C. Central University), and Michael Conley, Ph.D. (Duke University); Behavior Specialists Dreama Jackson, M.A. and Beverly Manley, B.S.; and clerk Sandra Thompson.

Hanu invites mental health staff to tour the new facility. You may schedule your visit by calling him at 919-575-3070.

You soon will be able to view the newsletter at the DOC Webpage at  
<http://www.doc.state.nc.us/dop/mhs/9901news/index.htm>

Comments, suggestions, and questions are welcome.

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## **What Is This?**

by Leon Morrow

This is a newsletter designed to provide information to Mental Health staff in the NCDOP. Dr. Robert Phillips, also known as “Deputy Bob,” conceived the idea as one way to improve communication among mental health staff. One goal will be to introduce new staff and new programs as they develop, as well as reintroduce existing staff and programs. There are now 151 Mental Health positions listed in the Mental Health telephone directory. At a recent meeting Randy Palmer reminisced about the days when all psychologist in the DOP could meet in one small conference room. In those days all MH staff knew each other personally as well as professionally and a close network of respect helped keep everyone abreast of changes. Today, Leon Morrow and Susanna Jarvis are being asked to work as the first editors of the quarterly newsletter and to use this system to carry on the tradition of professional and personal communication among our MH staff. Bill Hartley has agreed to work as the layout editor; his assistance in getting this edition published has been invaluable. Bill Poston, DOC Public Information Officer, volunteered to publish the newsletter on-line and his help is greatly appreciated.

This un-named newsletter is a conveyance for communication. Input from NCDOP MH staff will be requested to aid this endeavor. Your first opportunity to participate is to help name the newsletter. Please send your suggestions to Leon or Susanna on or before February 26, 1999. You can reach Susanna at (OA) CR29296, or at Brown Creek Correctional Institution. You can reach Leon at (OA) CR47410, (GroupWise) MWL10, or at the Western-Foothills Regional Office. In addition to recommendations for a name, your suggestions about articles, programs, etc. are coveted; your criticisms will be tolerated.

The newsletter is simply a means of communication and is not official policy of the NCDOP nor does it presume to reflect the official position of the MH leadership. In fact, the editors would like to be “not responsible” for any mistakes, miscommunications, spelling errors, etc. that ever occur in the new letter or elsewhere.

Tom Owens, as our new Chief Psychiatrist, and MH Director, is one of the new staff highlighted this month. While Bob Phillips has worked with us for many years, his role as Deputy Director is new so he is being reintroduced. The much heralded supermax at Polk Y.I., and the work of Hanu Rao, is being brought to your attention in this first issue.

In summary, it is hoped that this newsletter will improve communication among MH staff in the NCDOP. It is our goal for the information to be helpful, relevant and presented in a clear, professional and interesting manner. It is our intention to publish it on the Internet as well as on paper initially; later we may discontinue the paper version. Please plan to participate by providing comments and criticisms as well as information that can help others. For example, let us know when a new employee comes to work with you or if you would like for your program to be the focus of an article.