

Manfred Bleuler's letter to Robert H. Belmaker

Below is a letter written to me and Herman van Praag in 1977 by Manfred Bleuler and signed in his hand. It is framed on my clinic wall. The letter was a response to an invitation to contribute a chapter to my book on mania. I was hoping for a contribution on borderline cases between schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. Bleuler advised clinicians to hospitalize mania early in the situation and thus to prevent damage to family, friends and reputation. I have passed on this advice to young psychiatrists over my years as a hospital psychiatrist. However, nowadays as a private practitioner I treat many cases of mild mania in the community since hospitalization of such cases may be a tragedy and cause stigma and irremediable resentment toward the therapist and the family.

Manfred Bleuler influenced me in other ways. Early on my career, I read his chapter in David Rosenthal and Seymore S. Kety's 1968 book, *The Transmission of Schizophrenia*. In it, he stated his belief that schizophrenia would never be found to have a single gene as a cause, since he felt that genes act on behavior via temperament, and inheritance of conflicting temperaments causes a personality breakdown that constitutes schizophrenia. I found this convincing and was always skeptical about the chances of the massive search for schizophrenia genes, as in my editorial invited by Joseph Wortis and published in 1991 entitled "One gene per Psychosis?"

References:

Belmaker RH. One gene per psychosis? *Biological Psychiatry* 1991;29(5):415–17.

Rosenthal D, Kety SS. *The Transmission of Schizophrenia*. London, UK, Pergamon Press; 1968.

May 26, 2022

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Bahnhofstrasse 49,
October 28th, 1977

Professor Robert H. Belmaker M.D.
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and
Professor H.M. van Praag M.D.
Department of Biological Psychiatry
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Dear Professor Belmaker,
Dear Professor van Praag,

I thank you very cordially for inviting me to participate to your book on mania. I feel very sorry, that it is impossible for me to take over the task. I have too many obligations already for 1978 and it would be quite impossible for me to write a chapter for your book in 1978.

I regret this impossibility. I should have liked to describe my research work in regard to borderline cases with schizophrenia.

Please allow to make one suggestion :
I frequently know see, that younger psychiatrists have no idea, what a terrible burden it is for the family to care for a manic member. I have seen many cases, in which the patient has ruined the happiness, the social position of himself and of his family for good - as he had not been hospitalized at the right time. I am just now under the impression of the suicide of a patient : he had not been hospitalized during the manic phase. After his full recovery he had realized what a tragedy his disease had been for wife and children. And this is not the only case I know of. I think a chapter on the social significance of mania and the indications and contraindications for psychiatric hospitalisation will be most precious.

Very sincerely yours,

