

67-09C-DJY - to be Int. for
Dr. E. J. Engberg, Supt.
Faribault State School and Hospital

cc. M.E.K.

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WELFARE

TO: All Medical Services Division Institutions
Attention: Medical Directors
Administrators

Jan. 12, 1967

FROM: David J. Vail, M. D.
Medical Director

SUBJECT: Operant Conditioning

Operant conditioning in the treatment of the mentally ill and mentally retarded is still in an experimental phase. It may turn out to be a great boon to us. On the other hand, there are certain dangers in the technique, and the possibility of practices arising which on their face are bizarre and difficult to explain to the public.

I believe that we should set some guidelines for this type of work. I have asked Joe Lucero to coordinate this effort. Will you immediately report to him any experiments in operant conditioning, behavior modification, etc., going on in your institution. I would like for him to visit these in the very near future.

I am not certain what procedures to establish for the future. Some clearance through this office will be required to set up new behavior modification programs. I am not sure at this point whether a full-dress research-type clearance will be called for; I will check with the Mental Health Medical Policy Committee on this.

For discussion at the March 17, 1967, Superintendents' meeting.

DJV:r

cc - Mental Health Medical Policy Committee