

J. Wilbert Edgerton: Introduction for the 2000 Recipient of the Society for Community Research and Action Award for Distinguished Contributions to Practice in Community Psychology

This marks the 18th occasion in which SCRA has honored the practice of community psychologists. This is a very important award for it identifies that community psychologists DO value practice; that there is IN FACT an interdependence between science and practice.

Dr. J. Wilbert Edgerton is an exemplar of practice. He has been a pathfinder in designing preventive mental health services in a county health department, and in being an advocate for mental health services in rural areas of Alabama as Director of the Alabama Association for Mental Health. He elevated the scope of his practice as Consultant in the Charlottesville Regional Office of the National Institute of Mental Health and then as Chief of the NIMH Regional Office in Chicago. This latter appointment was at a time when most Regional Directors were usually physicians. This period, from 1952 to 1965, represents 14 years of continuous full-time practice.

He returned to his native North Carolina in 1965 and continued to practice for another 24 years at the University of North Carolina where he had appointments as full Professor in Psychology, Psychiatry, and Mental Health.

There he was a key faculty member in training multidisciplinary teams to create and deliver community mental health services. This work resulted in a series of studies in two rural counties in North Carolina and a book: *Experiences in Rural Mental Health*. One of the findings was that citizens desire more than clinical services. This led him and his colleagues to carry out a more intensive study in three rural counties on the relative effectiveness of adding more pragmatic, less medically oriented, and more emotionally focused services. This work resulted in another book *Alternative Care in*

Community Mental Health. He has been Professor Emeritus since 1989. By the way, Wil was the seventh President of SCRA in 1973–74.

Since then, among his many activities, he has worked as a volunteer lobbyist in advocating for the needs of the mentally ill before the North Carolina Assembly. Now that IS really practice.

Born in a rural area of North Carolina he has been committed to his roots and has thereby honored his heritage. His Quaker membership is reflected in his quiet, effective steadfast principles that transcend professional activities. He was a conscientious objector in World War II.

SCRA is not the first to honor Wil. The American Public Health Association, the North Carolina Psychological Association, the National Rural Mental Health Association, and Division 18 of APA and APA itself have preceded.

SCRA is here today to say that we are fortunate that your down home knowledge and wisdom, consummate skills, and unwavering commitment to issues of community have enriched our field. It is a pleasure for me to introduce you.

James G. Kelly
Professor Emeritus
University of Illinois at Chicago