

FOREWORD

This issue of *Seminars in Speech and Language* is focused on the growing number of adults who are seeking help for developmental or acquired learning disabilities. Typically, these adults have difficulty understanding and using spoken or written language, planning and organizing tasks or activities, and remembering information. It is a heterogeneous clinical population whose complex constellation of disabilities can be severely handicapping.

Some of these adults are able to trace their disabilities back to lags in the acquisition of age-appropriate spoken language during preschool years. Others may not recall having difficulties until they began to read and spell in elementary school or enrolled in specific academic subjects in middle or high school. Those who were diagnosed as having attention deficit disorder, with or without hyperactivity, or central auditory processing disorders as young children may have received needed medical and academic support services throughout most of their school years. For many others, however, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, academic difficulties were attributed to behavior problems or to anticipated underachievement rather than a disability.

Another important subgroup in this clinical population are those whose learn-

ing disabilities were acquired, usually as adolescents or young adults, as a consequence of brain injury. The resulting cognitive-linguistic impairments, even when subtle, often produce significant functional problems in perception, attention, decoding, encoding, and retrieval of information. And until recent years, individuals with learning disabilities were unable to pursue postsecondary education successfully because the academic support services they need were not available in those institutions. It is no surprise, then, that educational, vocational, and social handicaps often resulted.

To help us better understand this challenging clinical population and its appropriate clinical management, I asked Jane Baran of the University of Massachusetts to serve as guest editor of this issue of *Seminars*. Dr. Baran assembled a talented, multidisciplinary team of experienced clinicians and researchers, and their perspectives of adults with these disabilities, their assessment, and treatment provide readers with management strategies and procedures that have immediate, practical applications to this long-neglected, emerging clinical population.

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