

Where two ways meet: probation and parole services in New South Wales, their organisational history and development, 1951-2001 by [Dr. Jay Harley](#) P. 228

Nutritional Programs

Perhaps the most controversial program initiative which had its experimental beginnings in the seventies, but which became more prominent in the early part of the eighties was the move by Officer Jurriaan Plesman, of the Hurstville District Office, for the Service to consider endorsing “nutritional” programs [1](#). Plesman’s research showed the relationship between nutrition and behaviour modification, and its positive effects when applied to criminal behaviour [2](#). Plesman’s academic work in this area demonstrated an association between diet and emotional disorders, and gave an explanation in terms of hypoglycemia to clarify the relationship between food, metabolism and emotion [3](#). He used, as a tool, the Nutrition-Behavior Inventory test (NBI) [4](#), which, through a series of fifty questions, was devised to determine the presence of any metabolic or biochemical disorder, as distinct from psychological aspects that could influence a client’s behaviour [5](#). He found, for example, that whenever a client scored higher than 53 in the NBI, he would prove invariably to be hypoglycemic according to a special Glucose Tolerance test conducted by Dr George Samra of Kogarah [6](#). Plesman believed that such a test was of importance in cases of a prisoner’s likelihood of returning to drugs, once released to parole [7](#).

Plesman, who joined the Probation and Parole Service in 1974, was a firm believer in the possibility of rehabilitation, and his personal philosophy supported the “guidance” aspect of the role of Probation and Parole Officers, with a less important focus on the “supervision” component [8](#). His influence came from his professional training in psychology and psychotherapy, but he recognised that this brought with it a conflict in his own role definition, and one which was not eased with the passage of time [9](#). In 2001, Plesman reflected:

“That I survived for so long is due because I felt comfortable with my clients and my professional colleagues in the Service. They were my friends and source of support ... but I felt at odds with an illusive hierarchy of the Department, who seemed to pursue different aims from what I perceived Probation and Parole was all about.”[10](#)

Plesman’s incorporation of nutritional counselling into his role as a Probation and Parole Officer, despite its apparent usefulness and record of testimonials from satisfied clients and family members, was a source of concern for the Department[11](#). The application of the NBI upon client assessment and treatment, both in individual client work and in group work, brought initial support by Plesman’s Officer-in-Charge Bernie Dummett, and also tolerant support by his Regional Director Jim Derrick[12](#). It appears, however, that when word of Plesman’s techniques spread into medical circles, the tolerance waned, and Plesman was banned from practising his methods of nutritional counselling[13](#). He recalls:

“Jim Derrick supported me, but only privately. He said the objections came from higher up, and that he had little influence on policy directions. Thus, in general I gained support perhaps prior to the 1980s, and then support was not only withdrawn but actually I was prevented by all sorts of means from practising nutritional counselling ... (Some time later) I was told by Jim Derrick that I was not allowed to practice “nutritional medicine” which was also considered to be beyond my expertise. I told him that I had a post-graduate diploma in Clinical Nutrition. But this was not a necessary qualification for Probation and Parole Officers. I told him that I was not willing to withhold information to a client when he would tell me that he could not sleep and that he would wake up at 3 a.m. I said I was not prepared to tell a client “Yes, I know why you cannot sleep, but the Department says I am not allowed to tell you”.”

“So they sent me to Long Bay Gaol. As soon as I arrived there, Di Kerrigan, who was then in charge at the Parole Unit, wanted me to run groups in gaol. That was a challenging proposition, because

Prison Officers were to join. That would have been interesting as I taught Transactional Analysis. I had to submit a program in writing, which I did in February 1983. This was knocked back by the Regional Director on 15 July 1983.”

“I, of course, continued nutritional counselling in private with clients.”[14](#)

Service correspondence reveals that although Plesman’s integrity or expertise was not in question, the issue of concern was that his methodologies were not in harmony with the basic role of Probation and Parole Officers[15](#). As articulated by the Director, Mark Robertson, in a letter to Plesman in 1982, “It has become obvious that the Department must clarify the legal and professional position of its Officers providing professional advice and treatment based on qualifications not specifically required for the job.”[16](#) Robertson, who in interview almost twenty years later reflected positively about Plesman’s commitment to his theory, also recalled:

“Jur’s experiment was a concept based on his belief that diet was the cause of people offending. In every Pre-Sentence Report he talked about diet. Magistrates were complaining about this. I had to tell him that he couldn’t do this!”[17](#)

Plesman’s recollection differed. His justification for his approach to his work took an alternative perspective:

“There were legal requirements to provide “supervision and guidance” and if the Department is not utilizing Officers with special qualifications in psychotherapy (including clinical nutrition), then the Department is not fulfilling the expectations of and legal obligations to the community in supervising and rehabilitating offenders.”

“I find it difficult to believe that Magistrates were complaining about me “talking about diet” because - firstly, all my Pre-Sentence Reports were vetted by my superior Officers... secondly, no such complaints were communicated to me directly or via the Officer-in-

Charge ... and thirdly, I have personally received compliments from Magistrates, one of whom joined the Hypoglycemic Association ... and District Court Judges - one of whom consulted me privately in his chambers about a personality problem of one of his family members. Some Magistrates were keen to have some clients attend my therapy groups as a condition of a recognizance.”[18](#)

Plesman maintained that he avoided giving nutritional explanations for offenders’ behaviours, in Pre-Sentence Reports[19](#). But he further maintained his stance that offenders were at liberty to obtain, from medical practitioners or health care workers, substantiation that their condition, be it hypoglycemia or something else, may have been a factor in the commission of an offence[20](#). He added:

“If I mentioned that a doctor had diagnosed a client as having hypoglycemia on several occasions, it is simply because most drug addicts are hypoglycemic as diagnosed by doctors, and about 70% of offenders appearing before Courts are drug addicted offenders. The obsession by my superiors about “diet” lies at the door of the Department’s hierarchy. I repeat again that nutritional factors constitute only a minor but very important part of the overall psychopathology of offenders. The perceived “obsession about diet” is due to the fact that it was the focal point of dispute between me and the Department.”[21](#)

Later, in 1983, following a report by a Departmental Research Officer[22](#), Plesman was banned from administering the Nutrition-Behavior Inventory[23](#). Comments Plesman:

“The ironic side of the whole saga was that my superiors in the Service accused me of being narrow- minded, with blinkers on “hypoglycemia”. Little did they understand that the psychological aspects of counselling formed the greater part of my program. One out of eight chapters in my book “[Getting off the Hook](#)” is devoted to clinical nutrition, and the remaining seven chapters are devoted to psychotherapy.”

“I was a thorn in the flesh (to my superiors) whilst I was at Long Bay Gaol and I was transferred to “country duties”. Three months here and three months there, to Tumberumba, Glenn Innes and then to Cessnock ... I know what a compulsory transfer meant to Officers who had their social and family ties wherever they happened to serve in the Department. I guess this was and perhaps still is a way of getting rid of Probation and Parole Officers!”[24](#)

Plesman retired in 1986, but continued to serve as a relieving Officer for some time on a temporary basis[25](#). He continued to practice nutritional counselling, but without the fervour for its promotion that during his Probation and Parole career, had brought him into conflict with the hierarchy of the organisation[26](#). In interview in 2001, Plesman held fast to his belief that there exists a gap between psychological counselling and psychiatric counselling which should be filled by professionals, including Probation and Parole Officers, trained in psychology, sociology and clinical nutrition[27](#). He refers to the relationship between hypoglycemia and nutrition, and behaviour modification, as “the forgotten factor in the crime debate”[28](#).

1. Plesman, J., Interview 21 December 2001

[2](#) Cf. Plesman, J., “The Behavioural Aspects of Hypoglycemia as Tested by the Nutrition-Behaviour Inventory”, Probation and Parole Officers’ Association Journal, Vol.7, 1984, No.1., pp.1-23

3 Ibid

4 The Nutrition Behaviour Inventory test was originally designed by Dr Alexander Schauss of the U.S.A.; cf. Schauss, A.G. (1980), Diet, Crime and Delinquency, Parker House, Berkeley, Cal., U.S.A.

5 Ibid

6 Plesman, J., Interview 4 April 2002

7 Ibid

8 Plesman, J., Interview 1 December 2001

9 Ibid

10 Ibid

11 Ibid; Robertson, M., Interview 13 November 2001

12 Cf. Dummett, B., Letter to the Regional Director South, “Initiatives – Hurstville District Office”, 6 November 1980; Dummett, B.,

Letter to the Regional Director South, “Group Therapy – Hurstville District Office”, 25 March 1981

13 Robertson, M., Interview 13 November 2001

14 Plesman, J., Interview 1 December 2001

15 Robertson, M., Letter to Plesman, J. (date obscured) 1982

16 Ibid

17 Robertson, M., Interview 1 December 2001

18 Plesman, J., Interview 21 December 2001

19 Ibid

20 Plesman, J., Interview 4 April 2002

21 Ibid

22 Porritt, D., Chief Research Officer, Report on “Papers Submitted by Jurrian Plesman on Hypoglycemia”, 12 December 1983

23 Ibid

24 Plesman, J., Interview 21 December 2001

25 Ibid

26 Ibid

27 Ibid

28 Plesman, J., “[The Forgotten Factor in the Crime Debate](#)”, Hypoglycemic Health Association of Australia Newsletter, 1 June 1990.

The article, and Plesman’s approach to the treatment of emotional disorders can be viewed at the web site of the Hypoglycemic Health Association of Australia, on <http://www.hypoglycemia.asn.au>. Plesman explains how a metabolic disorder affects behaviour and emotions and how this can be treated nutritionally. It explains the connection between depression, addiction and hypoglycemia. It also contains a self-help psychotherapy course centering around Transactional Analysis, the Self-Image, Assertiveness Training, Values Clarification and Communication and Counselling. These programs were taught in therapy groups of offenders, thus encouraging members to do their own therapy.

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