REPORT OF A ROUND TABLE ON OCCUPATIONS FOR MENTAL AND NERVOUS CASES

The chairman (Dr. Dunton) stated that as he had known but

ten minutes before that he was to preside at this round table he

had not prepared any subjects for discussion, and asked for any

questions to be brought up. There being none volunteered, he

suggested that the question of establishing contact was always

of interest, and that he would like to hear some remarks on the

subject. There had just been held an interesting discussion on

treatment of the tuberculous, but much that had been said there
did not hold for mental cases. In the first place, the physical

conditions were very different. In his experience he had fre­
quently been able to establish contact in unusual ways, and
related an experience with old songs. He regretted that at

present there are no simple means of measuring the interest of

patients, but hoped that the various investigations being con­
ducted by psychologists would result in determining some simple

test or method.

Miss Roorbach said, of the effect of old songs upon patients,
that when played upon the phonograph, "Annie Laurie," "Auld

Lang Syne," "Rock of Ages," "Old Kentucky Home," and others
of that nature would break down the feeling of restraint and one
by one the patients would join in, first humming, and then
singing the words. With a catatonic subject, or one frightened
by his environment, she had found that by letting him sit in

class, watching and listening, and offering him fruit and tobacco,
as to the others, although he was doing nothing to earn it, would
win his confidence and break down his reserve.

Miss Carolyn Bean, of Wisconsin State Hospital for the Insane
at Mendota, said that she had had under her care a catatonic

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praecox boy who usually sat with his head almost touching his knees and who was stimulated by the use of the volley ball and running a race. It was necessary at first to take the patient by the arm and lead him to the volley ball court. He showed no apparent interest. His step was slow and awkward and his muscles were rigid, although he offered no resistance. The occupational worker placed the ball in his left hand and finding no response, lifted his right arm and made him go through the necessary motions and hit the ball. The ball dropped to the ground a few feet in front of him, but he made no effort to pick it up. The ball was again placed in his left hand and this time the patient was told to hit it with his right fist. Very slowly he moved his arm back as he clenched his fist and knocked the ball out of his left hand.

It was more than a week before he was energetic enough to put the ball over the net. Gradually his posture became better and he began to play catch with another patient. At first he would not pick up the ball if he did not catch it, but after a little urging he slowly walked over to the hall and with much deliberation finally picked it up.

It was very evident to anyone looking at him that his circulation was very poor and the occupational worker realizing this fact, thought she would see if running a race might stimulate him. The goal was decided upon and the patient was started by his contestant taking hold of his sleeve just at the start. The race ended practically in a tie. The patient returned somewhat out of breath and his face showed the first bit of animation that had been seen since his arrival at the hospital. When it was announced to the other patients that the race was a tie, the praecox boy spoke up and said, "No. He won." It was the first time that he had said anything for weeks.

This seemed to be the turning point, for from that day the patient improved rapidly. He began to feed himself, took a little more pride in his personal appearance and conversed more freely. After a month had passed he was able to take part in real volley ball games, and a few weeks later was allowed to return to his home.
A physician present spoke of the variations of golf as means of initial stimuli and also discussed the various types of old songs.

Mrs. Slagle said that it had been her habit to ask patients for their favorite song. Very often it was "Silver Threads among the Gold." Often this song could be used as a means of unconscious stimulation. There was frequently a spontaneous reaction to dance music and this often ushered in the beginning of improvement. She felt that more color should be used in wards.

Mrs. Anderson asked if it is advisable to have music too continuously.

After some further discussion the meeting adjourned.