

Whitaker was among therapist pioneers

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By Fran Bauer

Private services will be held Tuesday for psychiatrist Carl Whitaker, who was among the first family therapists and also taught at the medical school of the University of Wisconsin- Madison.

Whitaker died Friday at his home in Nashota of complications of a stroke. He was 83.

Born in northern New York state, Whitaker earned his medical degree at Syracuse University. During World War I, he taught at the University of Louisville, in Kentucky, then left that job in 1944 to become director of the Department of Psychiatry at Oak Ridge Hospital in Tennessee.

In 1946, he joined the faculty at Emory University in Atlanta, where he was chairman of its psychiatry department. While there, he co-authored a book with Tom Malone called "The Roots of Psychotherapy."

In 1955, he established the Atlanta Psychiatric Clinic, where he worked with patients and their families using the original ideas he had developed about family therapy.

In 1965, he joined the faculty at the medical school of UW- Madison, where he taught in the psychiatry department until retiring in 1982.

Whitaker became known for his experimental work in developing what he called symbolic family therapy and wrote a number of articles and book chapters about his theories.

He also taught a generation of psychiatrists how to use his techniques by working as either a co-therapist or consultant, said his daughter, Nancy Whitaker Emrich, of Portland, Ore. His approach to working with families was captured in a book he wrote with Augustus Napier called "The Family Crucible."

Whitaker stressed the importance of the relationship that therapists developed with their clients.

He felt that the way people see things symbolically was very important, his daughter said. But technique wasn't as important as the relationships that developed during therapy.

Whitaker noted that families know a lot about how their members interact, and if therapists respect that, families will always know where they need to go to solve their problems, his daughter said.

"He really was one of the first people to begin offering family therapy," she said.

"He stressed the need to look at the generations, and what went on with the grandparents, which is still important to this generation. If he could get the whole family together, that was best,

because then everyone could talk together."

In addition to his daughter and his wife, Muriel, of Nashota, he is survived by other children, Elaine Morgan of Atlanta, Bruce Whitaker of Houston, Anita Whitaker of Carmel, Calif., Lynn Scheidenhelm of Boulder, Colo., and Holly Warner of Nashota; his brother, Lee Whitaker, of Palm Harbor, Fla.; and sister, Miriam Dowd of Vancouver, Wash.

There will be a visitation from 4 to 7 p.m. Monday at the Harder Funeral Home, 18700 W. Capitol Drive, Brookfield. Services Tuesday will be private. The family suggests contributions to the Nature Conservancy.