No Rest for the Wicked

by JAN FAWCETT, MD

It's dog days summer weather in my country get-away, almost too hot to play golf, and not quite even August yet. Still, I do not want to turn my attention from the lush, wooded solitude back to responsible work. Well, as they say, "no rest for the wicked." Look at this! The topic of this month's issue of *Psychiatric Annals*, guest edited by Ansaar Haroun, MD, is "Psychiatric Aspects of Wickedness." Coincidentally, this issue was scheduled before Andrew Cunanan's killing spree of five men, including a very prominent Chicago real estate developer and fashion designer Gianni Versace, for reasons we will never know (following Cunanan's suicide), and which has dominated our mass media over the past few weeks. This is a prime example of the behavior discussed in this issue.

How can a psychiatric education journal feature an issue with such an unscientific title as "wickedness"? Years ago, I accepted a request to testify as an expert witness for the State of Illinois in the trial of John Wayne Gacy. Gacy was being tried for the murder of 33 young boys who he buried under his house. I remember accepting this invitation because I was curious as to "where illness left off and wickedness began." I found Gacy an unsettling person to talk with, even in the safety of his cell in the Cook County Jail's Cermak Hospital wing. J. Reid Meloy's article on psychopathy and sadism describes the "atavistic reactions" I felt when Gacy calmly told me "I was only getting rid of human trash" in referring to his serial murders. Unscientific? It appears to me that a number of abnormal behaviors that we have little or no scientific understanding about are consequently not covered in DSM-IV. This series discusses these behavioral patterns and the definitions of wickedness from a clinical, biological, philosophical, cultural, and legal point of view. While there is not any "we're close to a cure" optimism about our very limited understanding of behavioral states leading to wicked behavior expressed in this series, there is a good and realistic review of what we do know and the complexities involved, as well as some practical clinical insights.

For me, reading this series of articles was a reminder that "meaningful work is a blessing" even if it demands I give up my summer solitude for awhile. I guess it all comes down to maintaining the right balance.

Jan Fawcett, MD
Editor