

JANUARY 26, 1992

LETTERS

Recognizing Some Of Psychiatry's Errors

Dr. Marc Waldman, a resident in psychiatric training, claims that psychiatry is as much a science as any medical specialty [Jan. 5], but his letter criticizing Grace Ann Inyard's earlier comments [Dec. 8] demonstrates that sometimes it is not. Science demands recognition and correction of past errors.

Ms. Inyard emphasized how lobotomies, so perceptively described in "Lingering Effects of Lobotomies of 40's and 50's" [Nov. 3] were among psychiatry's worst errors. Dr. Waldman responded by erroneously equating intent with effect and then denying harmful psychiatric intent, thus ignoring the harm which psychiatrists had in fact inflicted.

Let us hope Dr. Waldman's supervisors at Hillside Hospital-Long Island Jewish Medical Center will some day teach him also about the Nazi psychiatrists who murdered the patients they had sworn to heal; the Soviet psychiatrists who prostituted their professional skills for political ends; the C.I.A. psychiatrists like Prof. Ewen Cameron of Montreal, a past president of both the American and World Psychiatric Associations, who destroyed unknowing patients with huge amounts of electroshock, and today's American psychiatrists, whose preoccupation with new medications has permitted the destruction within public psychiatry of continuity of care and the doctor-patient relationship, two indispensable aspects of effective treatment.

NATHANIEL S. LEHRMAN, M.D.

Roslyn

The writer is retired clinical director
of the Kingsboro Psychiatric Center