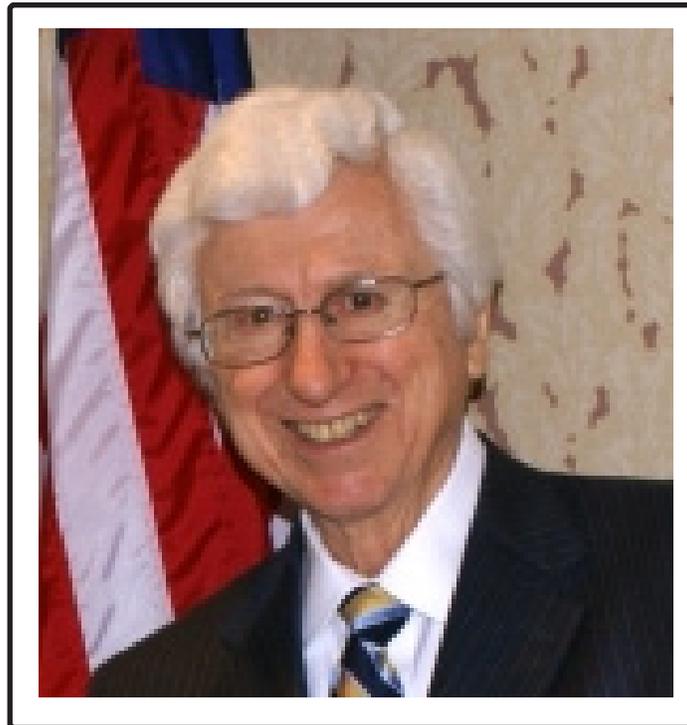




The Clinical Practitioner

In Memory of Nicholas A. Cummings



Dr. Nicholas A. Cummings, Ph.D., Sc.D., passed away on June 9, 2020. Nick would have been 96 years old on July 25, 2020. His wife of 74 years, Dorothy, his two children, Dr. Janet Cummings and Andrew Cummings, two grandchildren, Mary and Kent, and two recently born great grand children survive him.

Our Great Provocateur

By John Caccavale, Ph.D.

Professional Psychology has lost its champion - its last guiding light to relevance and we have all lost a friend and colleague. I personally am deeply saddened about Nick's passing. He was a close friend, colleague, and collaborator. However, I am more saddened that so many more psychologists have no idea about who Nicholas Cummings was. After announcing Nick's death, I received several emails asking me, "Who is Nick Cummings?" Hiding my disappointment, I directed those inquires to Nick's published biography, "Nicholas A. Cummings: Psychology's Provocateur," by Dr. Carol Shaw Austad, which is available on Amazon. I also asked the inquirers to look at Nick's last video presentation on the NAPPP.org website.

I had no intention to list the multitude of achievements attributed to Nick, because it is simply not possible to do so in an email or in these short pages to detail the life of a man who has done so much for professional psychology. Moreover, how does one really summarize the work of a man who has written 47 books, a few hundred articles, created and innovated a revolution in the education and training of psychologists, and created the first psychologist owned company providing services to

millions of patients? It is simply not possible.

I highly recommend, as I did to those inquiring about Nick, that anyone wanting to know why we even have psychology as a profession, to pickup Nick's biography and to see and hear from Nick himself in his last video on the NAPPP website. Nick deserves your curiosity.

Here, I want to talk about Nick, the person - the type of man he was, his lifelong commitment to advocating for our profession, patients, and to lifting professional psychology to the highest level of acceptance. In the many years that I have known Nick, he never once wavered from that mission. Nick and Dorothy, aided by his children, devoted untold time and treasure to Nick's goal to develop effective and efficient therapeutic treatments and to provide practitioners with the tools and resources to become effective professionals in both training and practice.

Some of Nick's critics in psychology's academic bureaucracy dismissed his work as being too focused on the "business" aspects of practice. Nick's response, as the true provocateur he was, created the first professional school of psychology in California and later, a company, American Biodyne, that was entirely owned and operated by psychologists. Nick demonstrated that practitioners could be both highly effective therapists and knowledgeable about the business aspects of running a practice. Nick was simply unwilling to accept that the work we do should not be reimbursed at a level appropriate to our education, training, and experience. Being a professional psychologist had value that, for many of us, had been obscured and looked down upon by those same bureaucrats who were also critical of Nick's lifelong work.

Nick was a fighter as well as an innovator.

Even as he assumed the presidency of the American Psychological Association, Nick could not be co-opted. He continued to fight APA's intransigence to private practice and reimbursement for our services and for the many roadblocks the academic bureaucracy put up to slow down the progression of private practice.

In my many conversations with Nick about his time as APA president, he reveled and took pride

in confronting resistance. Yet, one of the greatest aspects of Nick the man was the total lack of bad feelings he had for his critics, detractors, and those who desperately tried to derail him even to the point of betrayal. This was a man who accepted their calls for help and would not cast them off. I recall many times when I told him, “I couldn’t be that generous so often.” Nick would just smile. He accepted and understood the strengths and weaknesses of human behavior. Nick was the quintessential psychologist. He was a truly generous human being.

For patients, Nick advocated for access to quality mental health care. He served on many commissions and boards, many that he established to get greater access and funding for mental health. Throughout his career he lobbied Congress and presidents for patient care. He never accepted that people should not have access to care or could not be helped whatever the issues presented to a practitioner. It was a part of Nick’s character to confront the issues that he cared about most. In my many conversations with him about how greater access to care could be achieved, Nick was never without ideas. Although retired from practice for many years, I could always sense his frustrations that organized psychology was continually dropping the ball and being mostly inactive in promoting the high goals that we all had in becoming professional psychologists.

Nick believed in patient advocacy as a part of practice. He never accepted the platitudes to practice and patient care without commitment that is so lacking in organized psychology. For the entire year prior to Nick’s passing, he was concerned and disappointed, but not surprised, by the campaign by APA to downgrade the doctoral level as entry into professional psychology and the concomitant policy to gain independent practice for masters level practitioners. Nick had created and led the fight for licensure and fought over a 20 year period until every state licensed doctoral level psychologists for independent practice. To see that struggle dismissed and diminished was simply unacceptable to Nick Cummings.

His opposition was not to masters level education. Nick believed that patients deserved the highest quality of care and that care was better delivered

by a professional trained at the doctoral level. This is why he created and funded the Cummings Institute for Behavioral Health and created the Doctor of Behavioral Health degree. After creating the professional school movement, Nick saw that his vision and mission for doctoral level education had become entangled in APA politics and misplaced goals. The mission of the professional schools of psychology was to provide students with a practice-focused education and training and low to even no cost. That mission is long gone and transformed into tuition driven enterprise.

When he established the California School of Professional Psychology in 1970, over half of the incoming students were on scholarship. Now, students in these schools hardly ever receive a scholarship and many accrue over \$100,000 in debt by graduation. Nick attributed this debt to the misplaced notions of an “uniformed” academic hierarchy committed to overburdening students with irrelevant and unneeded coursework resulting in a high cost, debt crunching education. This is why Nick set the cost for the Doctor of Behavioral Health degree at \$20,000 to complete the entire program. Moreover, some students are on full scholarship. Nick always put his energy, talent, and money into those causes he believed in.

Nick was loyal and always available. If he believed in what you were doing, he was there to help. He didn’t care what others would say about anything he became involved in. For example, in 2006, I approached Nick and told him that a number of us were not happy about the direction that APA was taking with respect to practice issues. I told him that I wanted to start a new organization based upon the principles of no bureaucracy and commitment to service for practitioners and patients. Without flinching or taking another breath, Nick said, “Count me in,” and became a founding board member of NAPPP. Nick actively contributed to NAPPP until he retired from the board in 2016.

Nick’s commitment to his colleagues and psychology was important to him. For many years his foundation funded many programs that recognized the important achievements our colleagues. The foundation also funded The Nicholas and Dorothy Cummings

Center for the History of Psychology, located at The University of Akron in Akron, Ohio, that is a repository for collections and to preserve and provide access to the historical record of psychology and related human sciences. Clearly an important on-going project particularly when so many psychology programs have deleted courses on the history of psychology.

Nick was also a champion for his many colleagues, as well. For example, whenever he read something that a colleague wrote in a journal or elsewhere, the author could expect to receive an email or call from Nick with his kind words of praise and encouragement. He believed in recognizing the work of others. Although over the course of his professional career Nick received many awards and recognition, and was deemed as a visionary and prophet by many, he was always humble about his achievements. With the passing of Nick Cummings a large part of psychology has also passed. For those of us who were his friends and colleagues, Nick's passing is an enormous loss. He was a unique individual and a model for every psychologist to emulate.

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