

John Fulton



John Fulton started his social work career with a BA from the University of Minnesota in 1958. He earned his MSW from the University of Minnesota in 1960 and was hired at the Saint Cloud, Minnesota, VA Hospital. He provided clinical services, supervised students, and spent the last 2 years in research in the Psych Evaluation Project. He also taught part time at the University of Minnesota, St. Cloud campus, Sociology Dept.

He went through SWALT training with Bruce Braden at the Milwaukee VA Hospital in 1964/65. He was promoted to Chief, Social Work Service, Fargo North Dakota VA Hospital, in 1966. During that time he taught part time at the University of Minnesota, Morehead Campus, Introduction to Sociology and Social Work. He is proud that one of his students ultimately became the Director, Social Work Service, at the University of Minnesota Medical Center in Minneapolis, Minn.

In 1970 he was promoted again to Chief, Social Work Service, Brentwood, VA Hospital (West Los Angeles). At Brentwood he was part of a mental health management team that received special funding to demonstrate that many institutionalized veterans could live in the community. As a result Brentwood VAH went from 1280 inpatient beds to 350 beds in two or three years. The Social Work staff expanded from 22 when John arrived to 86, the largest in the VA at the time. John led the expansion of the community care program. During this time in California state mental hospitals were closing with insufficient community follow-up. The veterans who had been hospitalized at the state hospitals began coming to the VA. There were also many homeless Viet Nam vets. John's department was able to meet the challenges and serve the veterans discharged from Brentwood, discharged from state hospitals, and created innovative programs for Viet Nam veterans which became the precursor for the Vet Centers later established VA wide. John was also a SWALT preceptor 1975-79.

In June 1980 John was selected Director, SWS, VACO. He applied for the job, not thinking he would be selected, mainly as an opportunity to bring to the attention of people in VACO some of the problems being faced in the field that he did not think they were aware of, or at least weren't doing much about them. Those who interviewed him were impressed and selected him. His appointment was blocked for a year by another applicant who believed he should have been selected and appealed the selection decision. During that year John was assigned as a Program Specialist to the Deputy Associate Chief Medical Director for Program Management. In that role he was instrumental in the formation of the VA Geriatrics Health Services Liaison Committee and planning the VA's Independent Living Services Pilot programs. John, always seeing the positive, concluded that was a beneficial experience as he met key people in VACO. When he later became Social Work Director he already had working relationships with them that served him well as SW Director.

As VA Social Work Director John developed eight national social work committees: Resource & Program Development, Strategic Planning, Technology, Research & Program Evaluation, Professional Standards & Quality Assurance, Graduate & Continuing Education, Social Work Administrative Leadership Training, and Ethics. The committee chairs became the Field Advisory Committee which coordinated the work of the national committees. That was the beginning of social work committees that followed. The Field Advisory Committee evolved into the Social Work Leadership Council.

John was one of the original members of AVASW (then AVASWC) and remained a member throughout his VA career and his retirement. During his time as VA SW Director John supported and encouraged the activities of AVASW, and asked for input. One example: During one of the government shutdowns and subsequent furloughs of federal employees when President Clinton and House Speaker Newt Gingrich were clashing over the budget, the VA was asked to determine which employees were essential and which were non-essential and could be furloughed. Originally Social Work was included

in the non-essential category by the Chief Medical Director. John argued against that but didn't feel he was making much progress. He asked the President, AVASWC, to write a letter to the Chief Medical Director stating the association's position. A carefully worded letter describing the essential services social workers provide throughout the VA was sent. The designation of social work was changed to essential. Whether it was John's arguments, the letter from the AVASWC President, or both, that changed the Chief Medical Director's decision is not known. However, since then social work has remained in the essential category when furloughs are considered.

June 3, 1994, John retired. His parting comments, published in the December 1994 AVASWM Newsletter, were: "I have been personally and professionally challenged and enriched by the creative and effective leadership which each of you have provided. Representing you in VACO has been the highlight of my professional career. Because of your leadership and strength of the staffs and programs you have developed, the Service is strong and well positioned for the future." Much of the "strength" of social work in the VA was due to John's advocacy and leadership. I am pleased to nominate him for the AVASW Hall of Fame.