

10 of 1000 DOCUMENTS

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ADAMHA

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If the Senate approves, the Alcohol, **Drug** Abuse and Mental Health Administration (ADAMHA) will soon be headed by a Reagan appointee who is not a trained professional in any of those areas.

At the same time, some observers are concerned that the National Institute of Mental Health, ADAMHA's largest unit, is being turned into a smaller research agency.

ADAMHA itself is essentially an office with 161 employees who will spend \$7.5 million this fiscal year to supervise three larger units--the NIMH, the National Institute on **Drug** Abuse and the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, with a total budget of \$378 million--as well as \$462 million in block grants to states.

The nominee to head ADAMHA, Dr. Donald Ian Macdonald, is a Clearwater, Fla., pediatrician who has been associated with **Straight**, a controversial **drug** abuse organization based in St. Petersburg, Fla. Partly for this reason, his nomination was opposed by ADAMHA's boss, Secretary of Health and Human Services Margaret M. Heckler.

Macdonald discovered **Straight** in 1979 when, he said, his 15-year-old son "got in trouble with **drugs.**" **Straight**, he says, straightened out his son. While continuing his own practice, Macdonald was **Straight's** medical research director until two years ago.

He is one of many parents who praise **Straight**. Others don't. A Heckler memo to the White House (obtained by the Washington Report on Medicine and Health) noted that some people have likened **Straight's** program to "brainwashing." In a case now under appeal, a former **Straight** client won \$220,000 in damages from **Straight** last May, after charging that he was detained against his will for four months.

Macdonald, Heckler said, "has no government or management experience, . . . no knowledge or expertise in ADAMHA's basic fields" and would face "a difficult tenure."

Macdonald, however, also heads the scientific advisory board of the American Council for **Drug** Education, and the council's highly regarded president, Dr. Robert DuPont, calls him "a good choice" for the job.

In an interview, Macdonald said his new book, "**Drugs**, Drinking and Adolescence," will describe **Straight's** strengths, but also "its great weakness," the "passion" of the reformed youths who conduct its "peer pressure" training. This "needs to be tempered by responsible adult supervision," he said. "That was not always done." As for becoming head of ADAMHA, he said, "I'm not a weirdo or somebody who's going to come in and destroy the system."

It is the fate of "the system," not just the lack of a major professional leader, that concerns critics. Before ADAMHA was created in 1974 with separate **drug** abuse and alcohol institutes, NIMH was a single agency for all mental health

problems, including alcohol and **drug** abuse.

In the eyes of most mental health professionals, NIMH existed not just to do research but to improve care, and help people learn to cope with modern stresses. NIMH trained workers, upgraded state hospitals and played a major role in moving mental health care into the medical mainstream, largely by establishing hundreds of community centers.

In 1981, the Reagan administration began shriveling these programs, with a reduction in force that eliminated nearly 400 NIMH positions. It also halved all ADAMHA budgets, diverting the funds to block grants to the states.

This month, NIMH employes were told to brace themselves for another RIF that could eliminate 74 more positions next year and virtually eliminate NIMH's remaining training and community support programs. The latter now deals mainly with the chronically ill and the homeless.

Dr. Robert Trachtenberg, ADAMHA's acting administrator, said the cutbacks will help "make the agency more efficient and permit us to focus more of our resources directly on research," which he called "the primary mission."

But one NIMH official said, "The last RIF's scars are still in evidence in terms of morale and productivity. It's devastating to have a second RIF now."

The Senate must examine and approve Macdonald's nomination. Congressional committees will scrutinize the proposed RIF and "reorganization," and may restore some funds. But NIMH is sure to remain smaller and do less than before.

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