

# Godfrey H. Hochbaum (1916–1999): From Social Psychology to Health Behavior and Health Education

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**GODFREY HOCHBAUM WAS**, for many years, a leading figure in health behavior and health education and the application of behavioral science in public health. He is most noted for the development of and research surrounding the Health Belief Model (HBM), one of the most widely used models for understanding health behaviors. The HBM arose from his landmark study with the US Public Health Service in the early 1950s in which he examined factors associated with participation in tuberculosis screening programs.<sup>1,2</sup> Hochbaum was one of the first social scientists hired by the US Public Health Service as part of the new Behavioral Science Section.<sup>3</sup>

Hochbaum was born November 19, 1916, in Austria. His family immigrated to the United States in 1938. During World War II he served as an intelligence officer in the US Army. He completed his PhD degree at the University of Minnesota in 1952. From 1957 to 1967 he was Assistant Chief and then Chief of the Behavioral Science Section of the US Public Health Service. From 1972 to 1988 he was a professor in the Department of Behavioral Science and Health Education, School of Public Health, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Throughout his career, Hochbaum received a number of distinguished awards

and recognitions in the health sciences (e.g., the Mayhew Derryberry Award for “Outstanding Contributions to Health Education by an Eminent Behavioral Scientist” in 1981).

Hochbaum is credited with creating 2 enduring contributions to public health science. The first was the HBM, which itself was one of the first social–psychological theories that directly addressed health behavior and most importantly laid the groundwork for many of the social–psychological theories that now underlie health behavior and health education research and practice. The HBM, including the hundreds of studies that have employed it since it was established, is still taught in graduate public health programs today.

His second contribution was showing how theoretically based modern scientific research could be applied to important questions about health behavior, that is, understanding why people behave the way they do with regard to their health. The 1961 *Journal* article abstracted here argues that principles of research design can guide the planning of public health investigations. From the early 1960s until his death in 1999, Hochbaum was a strong advocate for applied social science research in public health.

Just prior to his death, Godfrey wrote to a colleague:

The primary functions of behavioral scientists in applied fields like health education are to find ways of adapting and modifying theories and to turn them into “tools for planning and constructing programs. It is somewhat like the relation between physical scientists and engineers.”<sup>3(p677)</sup>

Hochbaum’s contributions to public health are undoubtedly best summarized by a colleague, J.A. Earp, who wrote:

Godfrey was our first social psychologist, one who made great strides in translating abstract theory to real life (and specifically to health) in an easy-to-operationalize theory. Although he did not actually do extensive research to test the applicability of the theory he helped originate, and although others would go on to develop the subtleties and complexities of both the theory and its application, he bridged these two worlds (J.A. Earp, ScD, Department of Health Education and Health Behavior, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, unpublished eulogy, 2000).

Indeed he did. ■

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## Contributors

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