

French Psychoflap

Post-Freudian Lacan.

Freudian psychoanalysis is far from the mainstream in modern mental health care. But it's alive and well in France--and it just got a shot in the arm from health minister Philippe Douste-Blazy, to the consternation of many scientists.

Speaking at a 5 February meeting of psychoanalysts in Paris, Douste-Blazy praised their work while announcing that he had ordered the removal from his department's Web site of a 2004 report concluding that the scientific evidence favors cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) over psychoanalysis. "You won't hear about [the report] again," Douste-Blazy, a cardiologist, assured his elated audience.

France has a strong psychoanalytical tradition, founded by Jacques Lacan (1901-81), who melded classic Freudian ideas with structuralism in what his detractors say is a pseudoscientific, cultlike movement now led by his son-in-law Jacques-Alain Miller. Many of its followers were angered when France's leading health agency INSERM issued a report in February 2004 that took the currently popular "evidence-based" approach to psychotherapy and concluded that CBT has the most to show for itself.

This time, many other psychologists and psychiatrists are incensed. "I'm totally amazed and puzzled," says Jean Cottraux, a psychiatrist at the Pierre Wertheimer Neurological Hospital in Lyon and a member of the INSERM panel. He calls the report's removal "an act of censorship" that could favor a regressive "Lacanian takeover" of the field.

There's speculation that Douste-Blazy's remarks also are behind the sudden resignation last week of epidemiologist William Dab, director-general for health, whose office had requested the study.