

Review

From Custodial to Therapeutic Patient Care in Mental Hospitals. By MILTON GREENBLATT, M.D., RICHARD H. YORK, Ph.D., and ESTHER L. BROWN, Ph.D. Russel Sage Foundation, New York, 1955. Pp. 497+vii. Price \$5.

This book describes a planned effort to improve the lives of patients in three mental hospitals. The Boston Psychopathic, a teaching hospital for acute cases only, receives most attention. Bedford Veterans and Metropolitan State have large chronic populations. The approach is entirely social; clinical aspects are occasionally referred to, but not discussed. Ample scope for reforming zeal was offered by a rigid administration which took no account of medical requirements; by repressive and restrictive measures, supposedly designed to protect the patient and society, but sometimes used punitively; by a ward of sixty-five patients, two-thirds of whom "rarely left the colorless, materially empty day rooms, halls and dormitories except to go to meals or wander through connecting wards . . . These men shifted for themselves. There was no regularly assigned attendant, nurse or employee of any kind. They never knew who was going to wake them in the morning, or to whom to bring requests with any assurance of serious consideration . . . The time from breakfast to dinner and dinner to supper, and supper until bed was a succession of periods of 'just sitting' or 'dozing'".

During the project there was an improvement in living conditions, amenities, clothes and food. Seclusion, restraint and sedation were reduced or abolished. Occupation and recreation were planned for and fostered. Classification was more careful and available facilities adapted more to the patients' varying needs. Greater responsibility was given to nurses and their initiative encouraged by easy social intercourse and informal discussion groups. A relaxation of social distinctions increased communication between doctors, nurses and others and created a sense of social unity and purpose. The process of changing "disturbed" and "deteriorated" wards, selected for special attention, is described in detail.

All who have embarked upon any part of such a programme will know its exigencies. Confident enthusiasm is an indispensable requirement in meeting them, and much in this book testifies to its wholesome effect. In the chapter on "Treatment Results", however, a more exacting attitude would have been valuable. A five-year follow-up study of 100 consecutive admissions shows that, following their discharge, less than 50 per cent. remained out of hospital for the whole of that period. Sometimes, too, the authors seem inclined to throw out the baby with the bath water. They quote with approval Dr. Banen who concluded that there are no reliable indications for predicting suicide in psychotics but emphasized "the universality of the suicide potential in any patient". Does this mean that in taking precautions against suicide no distinctions between patients are to be made?

As would be expected, much attention is given to securing the most effective effort from nurses. To a striking degree, informal methods are preferred to systematic instruction and training. In their recommendations the authors say "it is important that the hospital make provision for continuous in-service training . . . Psychodrama, seminars and discussion groups, the ward staff meetings . . . supervision of a counselling nature and group therapy sessions are amongst the useful techniques for helping members of the staff gain deeper insight". Again, "Provision of opportunity for the staff frequently to play together as a psychologically validated medium for lowering status barriers, reducing myopic misconceptions and misunderstandings and developing a spirit of camaraderie". Considering that all but a small proportion of the nursing staff were untrained aides and attendants, it is possible that this approach was the best immediate course open to the authors, but it is doubtful if, in the long run, it can sustain the effort required to produce the high standards of nursing care, already seen in a few hospitals today, without a solid foundation of systematic training.

The bibliography lists 665 classified titles and there is an excellent index.

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