

By Albert Deutsch:

# Filth-Infested Byberry Cured Only Two Out of 5900 Patients in Year

## New Buildings, More And Better Attendants Needed for Hospital

I have visited many mental hospitals in my time, but seldom have I seen the complete demoralization and disintegration that marks Byberry, the Pennsylvania state hospital for mental diseases serving the great and wealthy city of Philadelphia. Only an institutional revolution sparked by an aroused public can make Byberry fit for human habitation.

Byberry, along with too many of our state hospitals, can be compared only to Buchenwald and Belsen in its contempt for human dignity and human needs. I entered buildings, swarming with naked humans herded like cattle and treated with less concern, pervaded by a fetid odor so heavy, so nauseating, that the stench seemed to have, almost, a physical existence of its own. I saw hundreds of patients living under leaking roofs, surrounded by moldy, decaying walls and sprawling on rotting floors for want of seats or benches.

I saw children in their early teens lumped together with adults in all stages of mental deterioration. A Byberry physician admitted that these children, some of them not suffering from psychoses (serious mental disorders), were misplaced at Byberry but

about 27 per cent more discharged as improved.)

I asked my escort, Dr. Kramer, if there were many suicides at Byberry.

"No, thank heaven," he replied. "The plain truth is that there just isn't enough privacy here to permit a successful suicide attempt."

But there are many escapes, or elopements. Byberry was originally built as an almshouse; it is altogether unsuited for housing mental patients. I saw many frail doors damaged and destroyed, many ridiculously puny locks broken. Some doors had been boarded up.

The shortage of attendants was appalling. The Byberry psychiatrist who accompanied me on a night round told me there was only *one attendant* covering each of ten buildings of 300 to 400 patients each that night—when a minimum of 12 was needed in each. Adequate policing, let alone care, was impossible under the circumstances.

### Vagrants Recruited

Many of the attendants, I was told, are vagrants recruited directly from courts and police stations where they are reportedly given the choice of a jail sentence or going on the Byberry payroll. Dr. Sielke estimates that the attendant turnover is about 50 per cent.

A large proportion of Byberry's attendants are extraordinarily loyal and humane people working under

worthy of the name, no accommodations for married couples, no facilities for entertaining guests. Attendants couldn't even buy a meal for guests visiting them. One told me that when his father and brother visited him from Iowa recently, he was forced to walk ten miles outside the institution to get to a dining place.

What can be done to turn Byberry into a real hospital for the mentally sick?

It should be stressed here that conditions at Byberry were not war-created. Indeed, conditions were even worse before the war.

"What would you like to see done?" I asked Superintendent Sielke.

"Three things, mainly," he answered:

¶ "We need new buildings without additional patients. We ought to tear down many of the existing buildings."

¶ "We need more and better personnel."

¶ "We need more and better living quarters for our personnel."

To give Superintendent Sielke what he needs, Pennsylvania's administration and legislature must loosen their tight hold on the state purse-strings in behalf of the mentally sick. Public pressure, arising from public understanding and engined by public conscience, can accomplish this end. Not all of



mitted that these patients, many of them not suffering from psychoses (serious mental disorders), were misplaced at Byberry but that the institution was forced to accept them because Pennsylvania had no proper facilities for them.

## Dirt and Filth

I saw many broken windows, through which (I was told) cold blasts came through in Winter, endangering the physical health and lives of numerous unclothed patients, and flies swarmed in Summer. I saw dirt and filth in many wards. (Three or four of the scores of buildings are modern; several wards were spotless, but these were the exceptions. The food was cold and unappetizing; dining rooms were filth-infested.

Hundreds of patients were sleeping in damp, bug-ridden basements. Noisy and violent patients made life intolerable in barnlike dayrooms because there weren't seclusion rooms where they might be isolated until calmed down.

Only a few patients were under electric shock treatment in an institution with a population of 6100; a great many more could have benefited by such treatment. No insulin shock therapy was being used because, Superintendent Eugene L. Sielke told me, there wasn't sufficient personnel to administer it. Only a few score patients were given occupational therapy; at least 4000 should have had this beneficial work. The rest were consigned to deteriorating idleness.

## Two Discharged

Small wonder that Byberry's last annual report shows *only two* of 5900 patients discharged as recovered in the whole fiscal year of 1944, with an additional 306 discharged as "improved." (Normally, about 15 per cent of mental patients are sent home cured, and

A large proportion of Byberry's attendants are extraordinarily loyal and humane people working under great odds. On the other hand, unfortunately, there are many drunks, some of whom raid the alcohol bottles in Byberry's medical chests until they are caught and fired. Conscientious objectors who have been assigned to Byberry to help relieve the personnel shortage have informed me of many specific instances of brutal beatings of patients by this riff-raff type of attendant. I have in my possession a number of diaries kept by conscientious objectors which reveal shocking details of occasional brutality.

"We don't want to condemn these regular attendants," the CO's say. "The brutal ones are in the minority. The rest deserve great credit for their staying power."

"What kind of attendants can we hope to recruit with the low pay and poor living conditions we offer them?" Dr. Sielke asked, with a despairing gesture. "We have been paying them \$69 a month and keep. An authorization has just come through for an increase in base pay to \$88 a month.

## No Privacy

"But even that wage is far from enough to attract high-quality help. The turnover is so great that it hardly pays us to give them adequate training before they go on the wards. The shortage is so acute that we are forced to confine training to a few hurried lectures, then throw them on the wards where they are so desperately needed."

I found what Dr. Sielke meant by the living-quarters problem when I visited the attendants' dormitories. The building was neat enough, but the men were forced to sleep in long, narrow dormitories of ten beds each, with no privacy, no recreational facilities

from public understanding and engined by public conscience, can accomplish this end. Not all of Byberry's problems can be solved by purely local and state action. Essentially, the problem is a national one. Awaiting needed national effort, Philadelphia and Pennsylvania can initiate moves to erase the shame of Byberry.

## Start New Housing Project Next Week

The Ulmer Park emergency housing project in Brooklyn will be started early next week, well ahead of schedule because of an unexpectedly low bid on clearance of the site, Edmund B. Butler, chairman of the City Housing Authority, said yesterday.

The bid of \$159,377.50 was made by the B. Turecamo Contracting Corp. which has an asphalt plant adjoining the park. The project, consisting of 184 Quonset huts, will house 360 veterans and their families.

## Tomorrow's Ne

Experimental printing of newspapers "through the air" by radio facsimile will start in at least 15 cities this year, although facsimile broadcasting on a commercial basis remains a thing of the future.

That's what was announced yesterday at a facsimile demonstration for newsmen by John V. L. Hogan, president of Radio Station WQXR and of Radio Inventions, Inc.

At the demonstration, a special four-column edition of the St. Louis *Star-Times* was "printed through the air" by the radio facsimile process.

A newly developed FM sound and facsimile transmitter and FM sound and facsimile receivers were