

HOMAGE TO C.O.'S IN MENTAL HOSPITALS!

On many wards in this large State Hospital for the Mentally Ill, sick men have to "double-up" in the corridors of wards on the floor below theirs for an hour each before two of their daily meals--not enough attendants.

The ball diamond in the hospital court was bare of patients all last summer, when they might have been enjoying sun, exercise and beneficial recreation from the grim routine--no attendants could be spared to supervise their play.

For the same reason, the patients' church choir was deprived of rehearsal periods.

The skeleton force of attendants remaining after the inroads of draft and lucrative war jobs were men, at best none too content with working conditions and pay, now irritated and fatigued by extra duties, and so even less therapeutic in their effect on the patients.

Far short of the necessary personnel, hydrotherapy and other services abandoned or curtailed, with a psychiatric and medical staff woefully undermanned--such was the state of affairs here when early in '43 a group of ten C.O.'s arrived from various C.P.S. camps.

I speak from personal experience as a patient--though shortly to leave--in asserting that a perceptible atmosphere of fresh morale and easing of tension all around

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occurred when these men took up their duties, [REDACTED] ward attendants, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] and outside detail men. Despite a preconceived prejudice on the part of some of the old-line attendants, I am safe in stating that the patients sensed immediately that the C.O.'s were men of good will. (After five months of working together, with a few diehard exceptions, even these grumblers have come to respect the fellows.)

We have had ~~some~~ good ball games ~~and~~ this summer, with C.O.'s sponsoring us on their own time. A few patients have had the opportunity of using the bowling alleys and ping-pong table for the first time through the good offices of C.O.'s.

As I have known them here, C.O.'s do not look down on the insane as "inferior", but rather with sympathy, as unfortunates. This is only the common-sense act of humanists, yet is not in line with the customary asylum practice among ignorant attendants of "keep them in their place", deprivation of privilege, and in general forcing them into "submission".

A few conclusions: C.O.'s bring new "mental health" to the personnel itself of the mental hospital. They are ~~a~~ forward-looking and optimistic. If some so inclined among them can manage to organize a primary study of mental illness and the various therapies, they could provide important practical psychiatric work now lacking because of understaffing in the psychiatric ~~staff~~ personnel and a general lack of available trained therapists. (There has been no trained hydrotherapist here for

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several years, though the service is needed ~~and~~, very valuable equipment is at hand unused, and a salary and position are provided--there is simply no qualified applicant available.)

By sustaining a high moral atmosphere and conduct, C.O.'s in mental hospitals can give the mentally ill--already suffering the cruelest of ailments--relief from "man's inhumanity to man", taking a further step away from the barbarism of medieval London's notorious "Bedlam".

They can in their own practical way further bulwark humanitarianism here at home against the fascist idea.

--L.J.