



Columbia Park Hospital is one of three state institutions for the mentally retarded. Located on a bluff high above The Dalles, it offers residents, staff and visitors a panoramic view of the city, the Columbia River and The Dalles dam, and the barren hills of Eastern Washington. A total of 218 state employees work at the institution caring for 375 mentally retarded patients.

1975 Legislature to Determine Columbia Park Closure

"Will Columbia Park Hospital be closed in two years?" That's the question being asked by state employees who work in the institution for the mentally retarded located at The Dalles.

The best answer: "Yes, unless action to keep it open is taken by the next session of the legislature."

Confusion over the matter arose when a bill ordering closure of the facility by mid-1975 died in the waning days of the 1973 legislature. Demise of that bill, however, does not change the fact that closure of Columbia Park is "built into" the Mental Health Division's budget which has passed both houses of the legislature.

Therefore, the final decision on closure will be made by the 1975 legislature. If it takes no action the institution will be shut down.

The capital construction subcommittee of the legislature's Joint Ways and Means Committee originally favored closure of the Oregon State Hospital in Salem at the end of the 1973-75 biennium. Lawmakers wanted to transfer 390 OSH patients to Eastern Oregon Hospital at Pendleton and 100 severely ill patients to a proposed new psychiatric security unit at Dammasch Hospital at Wilsonville.

That suggestion, however, drew opposition from Dr. James D. Bray, administrator of the Mental Health Division. He told legislators that transferring patients to the Pendleton facility would prolong the length of their hospitalization "because of problems in maintaining continuity of care with community programs, and loss of family and other ties."

He said closure of Columbia Park Hospital would be a better move than shutting down OSH, both from the standpoint of patients and finances. Closure of Columbia Park will not result in a reduction of the level of care, he said.

The subcommittee then voted to close Columbia Park Hospital at the end of the biennium and

transfer its patients to Fairview Hospital and Training Center in Salem.

It also voted to reduce OSH to a 250-bed institution for the mentally ill until adequate community health facilities can be developed, and approved construction of a 150-bed psychiatric security unit at Dammasch Hospital to replace the existing maximum security unit at OSH which has been called "inadequate."

The subcommittee adopted a "statement of policy" which calls for the Oregon State Hospital to be closed as soon as conditions warrant.

Patient population at all of Oregon's mental hospitals has been declining steadily for a number of years while administrative overhead and service costs have risen.

Analysts for the Legislative Fiscal Office said the state would save about \$3.8 million in overall hospital costs by closing Columbia Park and transferring OSH patients to the new unit at Dammasch Hospital. Closure of Columbia Park alone would save an estimated \$2.7 million, analysts said.

Columbia Park began operation in 1929 as the "Eastern Oregon Tuberculosis Hospital." Thirty years later—in 1959—it was merged with the Tuberculosis Hospital in Salem. Patients were transferred to the Salem facility and Columbia Park Hospital became an institution for the mentally ill.

Care for the mentally ill was Columbia Park's function for the next four years. In 1963 the hospital was changed from an institution for the mentally ill to a facility for the mentally retarded. At that time, Fairview Hospital in Salem was overcrowded and had a waiting list of mentally retarded persons awaiting admittance.

Located on a bluff overlooking The Dalles, Columbia Park Hospital presently houses 375 mentally retarded persons. It has a work force of 218 employees to provide care for its resident population.

The institution is made up of eight primary

buildings containing seven resident wards, a 10-bed hospital, administrative offices, a kitchen, cafeteria, laundry and physical plant, and resident recreation and activity rooms. There also is an employee dormitory and four staff residences.

C.W. Palmateer, superintendent of Columbia Park Hospital, says the Mental Health Division hopes to place 100 of the institution's 375 residents into "community placements" when and if the facility is closed in mid-1975. The remainder of the residents would be transferred back to Fairview Hospital.

He said programs to place both the mentally retarded and mentally ill into "community living situations" were given impetus during the Kennedy administration in the early 1960's.

Columbia Park has operated a program for the past several years in which residents have been placed in nursing and foster homes and other private care centers in local communities throughout Oregon, according to Palmateer. He noted the program has gradually been taken over by the Public Welfare Division. It now establishes eligibility and provides payment to the private care center and follow up services.

Palmateer takes exception to the estimate that closure of Columbia Park would save the state some \$2.7 million. That figure does not include the cost of maintaining buildings and grounds if the facility is closed, he said, and noted that transferring residents to Fairview Hospital would increase its operating budget.

"I'm as concerned as any other taxpayer about the expenditure of funds," Palmateer says, "but there are other equally important factors to be considered before closing this institution."

Such factors, according to Palmateer, include the quality of the residents' living conditions and the quality of the education, training and recreation programs available to them.

For employee comments about the closure, please turn to the next two pages.