

Public Indifference To Mental Health Cited by Student

Editor's note: The following article was written by a June graduate of the school of journalism at the University of Oregon as an "editorial summary" of the conclusions developed in the senior thesis required of each graduate. The opinions are those of the writer.

By **KARLYN CARRUTHERS**
(Eugene, Oregon)

Mental illness, which costs Americans untold suffering and an estimated \$3 billion a year, is the nation's number one health problem. More Americans are in the hospital for mental illness than for polio, cancer, tuberculosis and all other diseases combined. The mentally ill occupy one-half of the hospital beds in the United States. It is estimated that one out of ten Americans will spend some part of his life in a mental hospital.

Yet the public, on the whole, is treating the problem with indifference. It shows great concern about the progress that is being made against other diseases such as polio and cancer. But there is no general public effort to combat mental illness. The public remains calm even though state hospitals, which care for 85 per cent of the mentally ill, are often overcrowded and facing personnel shortages. It is different despite the fact that not one major mental health research discovery of the past 50 years was made in the United States.

Feeling of Shame

The indifference is partially based on a general public feeling that being mentally ill is shameful. The strength of this feeling was demonstrated as recently as 1959, when Earl Long, then governor of Louisiana, drew national attention to mental illness. He was committed once to a mental hospital. When out, he played havoc with official business and behaved in an unpleasant, unbalanced manner. Unfortunately, the public reaction was one of disgust, instead of sympathy. Contrast this with the way that the public reacted after President Eisenhower's heart attack.

In order to abolish the stigma of mental illness there must be a general realization that mental illness is not hereditary, that under certain conditions it could happen to anyone and that mental diseases are not rare; they are common. For instance, in World War II mental breakdowns were the second most common cause of disability, after war wounds. Furthermore, it was found that almost any aviator, no matter how stable or rugged he might have been, developed symptoms of neurosis after 35 missions over Berlin. When the public understands that mental illness is a disease not a disgrace, perhaps it will insist on more intensive treatment and research of mental illness.

Possibilities Illustrated

The Kansas state mental health program illustrates what can be achieved when the public knows the facts about mental illness. Kansas people became mental health conscious because of the nationally famous Menninger Foundation, located in Topeka. In 1949 Kansas increased its state mental health budget 60 per cent, partly because of the direct efforts of Dr. Karl Menninger. By 1954 the number of patients at Topeka state hospital had dropped from 1800 to 1400, while the number of patients in practically every state mental hospital in the country was rising.

Despite the progressive program found in Kansas and other states such as New York and California, indifference is hindering mental health programs in many states.

State hospitals often provide only custodial care, because they lack the physical facilities and personnel to give intensive treatment. Imagine the public outrage if general hospitals were so limited they could only make the patients comfortable instead of trying to cure them!

In 1958 the inadequacy of many state mental hospitals was brought into the open by the American Psychiatric as-

sociation. It evaluated 215 large public mental hospitals. (There are a total of 277 public mental hospitals in the United States.) Full approval was given to 24 of the hospitals and 81 received conditional approval. Thus, 140 of the larger mental hospitals could not even meet the minimum standards of the A.P.A. "Human Warehouses"

Dr. William Menninger in 1957 called state mental hospitals "human warehouses." They are overcrowded and personnel shortages are depriving the patients of the treatment they need.

Veterans Administration hospitals, which provide outstanding treatment for mentally ill war veterans, have far bigger staffs than most state hospitals. In 1956 it was estimated that it would take the Western states 29 years to catch up with the V.A. hospitals in psychiatrists, 21 years to get as many Ph.D. clinical psychologists and 9 years to equalize the ratio for social workers. Despite the advantage they have over state hospitals, the managers of the V.A. hospitals say that they would increase each professional group by 25 per cent.

State mental hospitals often find it hard to attract professional personnel because the salaries they offer are so low. A certified psychiatrist must spend approximately 10 years in post graduate training. It is not surprising that the few who endure this long and expensive training often prefer a better paying private practice. Other psychiatric workers must also spend a lot of time and money to become trained in their professions.

Great Advances Seen

The general shortage of personnel is preventing the

United States from obtaining the full benefit of the new development in the mental health field. Some experts say that these developments are just the beginning. They believe that great advances can be made through research.

Mental health research has already shown some concrete benefits, notably the new drugs and the concept of the therapeutic community hospital which emphasizes treating the patient as a sick person who can get well and be a useful member of society again.

The amount spent by fed-

eral, state, and national voluntary agencies on mental health research increased from \$10,786,253 in 1955 to almost \$30 million in 1958. However, this sum is still far below the \$53 million spent on cancer research and is only one-tenth of what America spends on chewing gum.

The scope of present treatment of the mentally ill and the amount of mental health research being done indicates that mental illness is the nation's number one health problem primarily because the American public has allowed it to become so.

Menderes Backers Placed in Jail

Ankara—(UPI)—More than 300 legislators belonging to ousted ex-Premier Adnan Menderes' Democratic party have been arrested to curb a "whispering campaign" against Gen. Cemal Gursel's government, it was reported Wednesday.

Army sources said the arrested members of Parliament are being held on Yassada Island in the Sea of Marmora. About 80 per cent of the 408 Democrats in Parliament are now under arrest.

Court Takes Bids Under Advisement

The Jackson county court Wednesday took under advisement five bids for a rotary compressor for the Jackson county roads department. The bids were Cal-Ore Machinery company, Medford, \$10,915, including trade-in of two 1947 model compressors; Freenaugh Machinery company, Portland, \$9,989, including trade-in; Loggers and Contractors Machinery company, Portland, \$12,090, no trade-in; Baltzer Machinery company, Portland, \$10,900, with trade-in; and West Equipment company, Eugene, \$9,840, no trade-in.

MAIL TRIBUNE, Medford, Or. Thursday, June 2, 1960 c 3

Grange News

A travelogue of colored slides, taken in Carlsbad Caverns, will be shown Friday, June 3, at the Central Point Grange meeting by Delmar Smith. The lecturer, Mrs. Homer Jeffries, has also arranged for a ladies quartet from Medford to sing. During the business meeting the special committee on the school reorganization bill will report.

Canada's first parliament met in Halifax, Nova Scotia, 200 years ago.

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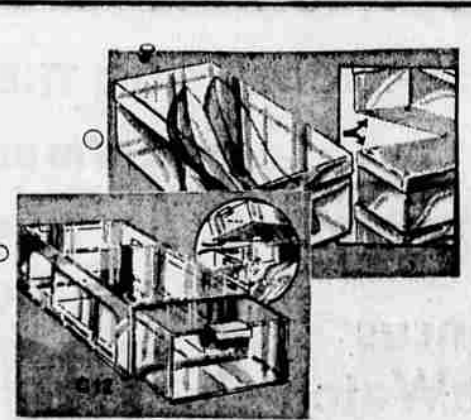
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He Didn't Dig the Sandbox Burglars

Milwaukee - Sanitation superintendent William J. Rheinfrank doesn't dig the way citizens have been playing it fast and loose in the city's sandboxes.

At the beginning of the winter the city put 1,200 sandboxes and shovels at strategic spots and marked them, "Sand for Ice Streets."

About three-fourths of the sand is missing. So are 307 shovels.

Rheinfrank wants a city ordinance passed that would fine people for stealing the sand.

"It's bad enough that some people steal it to weight down their car trunks," he said, "but we found one service station operator who covered his whole lot with the city's sand."