

Sketches from the history of psychiatry

The rules of the house

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Cardiff City Mental Hospital, now Whitchurch Hospital, was opened in 1908. The hospital was designed to accommodate 750 patients (336 male and 414 female) and included accommodation for medical and nursing staff. There were ten wards for each sex. The first Medical Superintendent was Dr Edwin Goodall, MD, MRCP, FRCS, who had previously worked at the Bethlem Royal Hospital and Carm Arthen Asylum. The total medical staff was three and there were 41 trained nurses.

The *Regulation and Instruction Book of the City of Cardiff Mental Hospital* (1919) came to light recently. Below are abstracts from the Rules which give some idea of the attitudes towards patients detained in psychiatric hospitals in the early part of this century.

- 1) Every male nurse or servant coming into contact with or passing the Committee of Visitors or Medical Superintendent, the Medical Officers, or the Chaplain shall give a military salute. The nurses are required to stand up if seated.
- 2) They must always bear in mind that the insane are not responsible for their words or actions, and must therefore on no occasion resent either intemperate language or unruly behaviour but exhibit uniform kindness, forbearance and sympathy.
- 3) The patients in general shall not leave their day room to go to bed until between 7.30 p.m. and 7.45 p.m.
- 4) When a patient escapes through inattention or carelessness the nurse in charge will pay a fine.
- 5) No nurse shall be permitted to smoke during the hours of duty.
- 6) No nurse is allowed to bring newspapers on to the ward without the permission of the superintendent.
- 7) All letters written by patients are to be delivered to the Medical Superintendent.
- 8) When a new patient is admitted he is to have a bath of a temperature of not less than 90 or more than 97 degrees as ascertained by a thermometer.
- 9) No patient can be visited for one month after his admission, unless by special permission of the Medical Superintendent.
- 10) Visitors are prohibited from receiving letters from patients for the post.
- 11) No patient is to be left alone with a visitor, except by special permission of the medical superintendent.
- 12) When the weather is cold the patients (exercising) are to be induced to walk quickly, but when the weather is warm they may proceed more leisurely and rest on the garden seats.
- 13) Wherever exercising, the patients are not allowed to pick flowers.
- 14) When walking outside the hospital, the patients are not to be permitted, upon any pretext whatsoever to speak to, or to communicate with persons outside or passing.
- 15) At church they (the nurses) shall behave reverently, join audibly, as far as they are able, in the chanting and singing, encouraging the patients to do likewise.
- 16) In preparing a bath, the cold water is always to be turned on first.

Conclusion

The above extracts from the "Rules" give some idea of the prevailing attitudes towards psychiatry in the early part of this century. They are self-explanatory and show the far more authoritarian and prison-like role of the in-patient psychiatry services.

References

- EVANS, M. (1983) *History of Whitchurch Hospital*. Whitchurch Press.
- THE COMMITTEE OF VISITORS (1919) *Rules and Regulations of Cardiff City Mental Hospital*, Whitchurch Press.