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Minnesota Bedlam

Hospital Needs Put at \$6,000,000

This is the tenth of a series of stories describing conditions in Minnesota mental hospitals. Geri Hoffner, Tribune writer, and Arthur Hager, Tribune photographer, visited all of the seven state hospitals.

By Geri Hoffner, Minneapolis Tribune Staff Writer

Additional personnel and higher salaries for the seven Minnesota mental hospitals will require at least a \$6,000,000 legislative appropriation annually, Carl J. Jackson, director of public institutions, estimates.

“And that amount – approximately double the salary appropriation in 1947 – does not include any provision to buy necessary equipment, food, fuel, or to build additional facilities for parents and staff,” Jackson said.



Jackson, who has been director since February, has a program for mental hospitals to set before the next legislature.

“I wish we didn’t have to spend another dime for buildings,” he said, “I wish we could begin to spend some of that money for other things our state hospitals need so desperately.”

But the \$5,000,000 building program approved in 1945 and 1947 was needed, too, Jackson pointed out. When patients are not cured, they fill – and more than fill – all available buildings until the state must pay for more brick and mortar.

The \$5,000,000 appropriation – one of the largest ever granted state hospitals for buildings – is still not enough to complete the job intended, and Jackson predicted, “We’ll probably have to ask them for at least \$2,000,000 just to finish the work.”

That building program originally included eight units for senile patients, each with 150 beds, to be located at St. Peter, Rochester, Fergus Falls, and Moose Lake.

When the first bids for the units at Fergus Falls came in \$300,000 over the allotted \$810,000, Attorney General J. A. A. Burnquist was asked if the division could spend more than the amount approved by the legislature.

Burnquist ruled no. So for the time being, Jackson said, each of the four hospitals will get only one senile building.

Other Buildings Planned

In addition to the buildings for seniles, the program calls for:

- Two 60-bed receiving units, one each at Anoka and Willmar at a cost of \$280,000 each;

- A 40-bed receiving unit, administration building, assembly hall and a fourplex for employees at Hastings at a total cost of \$686,000;
- A recreation and assembly building at Moose Lake at a total cost of \$364,000.

“This building program has to be the first thing,” Jackson said. “I think we must go through and finish what the legislature has started. And there is no denying we desperately need these buildings to relieve overcrowding.”

But the division intends to ask the 1949 legislature for more than the money needed to complete the building program.

Jackson said tentative plans have been made to request:

- Additional ward personnel to bring the ratio up to one nurse or attendant for every six patients. This would involve doubling the present ward personnel.
- Increased medical staff so there are more doctors per patients. There is now about one doctor for every 400 patients.
- More professional staff to direct essential therapy. This would include occupational therapists, persons trained in hydrotherapy, social, and psychotherapy.
- Instructors for nurses and attendants so that adequate training can be given.
- Higher salaries, particularly for attendants.

Cites Equipment Needs

Jackson said he also would like to see increased staffs in hospital kitchens and a “competent dietician at every hospital.”

“We should have roasting ovens, deep fryers, toasters, and hot food carts, too, if we’re going to give our patients the kind of meals they should have,” he said.

Jackson and Dr. Royal O. Gray, chief of the mental health unit, hope that someday there will be out-patient clinics at the state hospitals and elsewhere in the state to provide preventive and curative mental health services.

Such clinics, which might use federal funds available under the national mental health act, would help to catch mental illness in its early stages – at the time when it is easiest to cure.

Jackson believes that mental health “has to be a safe function because it is something that runs beyond the financial ability of most families.”

Urges Attitude Change

“But first of all we must break down this feeling that it’s a disgrace to go to a mental hospital. Fine, adequate clinics in which people would have confidence would help to do this.”

“They also would help to do the spade work in the prevention and early care that will eliminate the heavy institutional loads we now are forced to carry.”

Jackson and Dr. Gray also would like to see more psychiatric social workers employed not only by the mental health unit but at every state hospital as well.

Dr. Gray has urged for several years the establishment of a special building or department for mentally disturbed children. At the present time, many of these children are sent to the state hospitals. Others are sent next to the training schools at Sauk Centre and Red Wing.

Change in Laws Urged

The special children's building should be near the Twin Cities, Dr. Gray maintains. And the state laws should specify that juvenile patients are being sent there for "study, treatment, and education" instead of requiring their formal commitment to a state hospital.

Jackson also recommends employment of a statistician with the division.

"We should have information compiled on how many people have been discharged from the hospitals as recovered and how many of them have had to be readmitted," he explained.

"We should have other information, too, such as to classification of illness, ages, length of time spent in the hospitals, etc."

"We need these statistics not just for one year but over a period of years so we can use them to draw conclusions and make plans."

How much of the division's program does he think can be passed by the next state legislature?

Chance to Help Patients

Jackson refused to make any predictions.

"I know we have friends in the legislature who are genuinely interested in our institutions," he said. "If the problem is adequately presented, our cause will be given consideration."

"If we can increase our personnel and do a better job of instructing, pay more attention to diet and do more with the various types of therapy, we will do more for our patients."

Tuesday - Money and Public Support Can Bring About the Necessary Changes in Our State Hospitals.



TOO MANY BEDS, TOO LITTLE SPACE—Crowded into this attic room, more than 100 mentally ill men sleep. Too hot in summer, too cold in winter, the attic room does not provide anywhere near the 50 square feet per bed recommended for mental hospitals. Because there are no dressers or closets, the men keep their clothing on the floor. Because only a few pajamas are furnished by the state, most of the patients sleep in their underwear. At some of our seven state hospitals, beds are crowded so close together that the patient cannot climb out on either side but must crawl over the foot.