

## A NEW HAT IS BECOMING TO THE MENTAL HEALTH VOLUNTEER

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The stereotype of finding work for the volunteer just to pass her time has been discarded by psychiatric facilities in Milwaukee, largely through efforts of the Milwaukee County Association for Mental Health. The new philosophy is to discover jobs to be done, then find and help train the volunteer corps for the jobs. The Association has also pioneered in convincing hospital and clinic staffs that the right volunteer can be trained into a sub-professional member of the team, no matter what her personal or professional background might have been. The "envelope stuffers" and the "Mickey Mouse" jobs are as passé as the picture of Lady Bountiful taking baskets of food to the poor on Thanksgiving Day.

Therefore, in mobilizing the first skilled volunteer groups for both private and public mental hospitals in Wisconsin, the Association's Patient Services Committee and its Subcommittee on Volunteer Services emphasized well-trained volunteer corps as an objective.

St. Mary's Hill Hospital for women mental patients is a 54-year old non-sectarian hospital with young ideas. It became the proving ground for Wisconsin's first volunteer program in a private mental hospital through a representative on the Association's Patient Services Committee. A built-in volunteer group turned up about the same time the committee noted this specific volunteer need. The group consists of 28 Jaycettes from Greendale, a suburb of Milwaukee, one of a hundred Wisconsin Jaycette groups responsible for winning several national awards in the area of volunteer participation in the fields of mental health and retardation.

Sister M. Constance, O.S.F., director of nursing education at St. Mary's Hill Hospital, took on additional responsibilities as

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coordinator of volunteer services, and supervised four 1 1/2-hour orientation sessions over a period of four weeks. Volunteers were eased in. They toured the hospital, met patients, became aware of hospital procedures and the varied reactions of mental patients. Staff had orientation sessions too, and job descriptions were established for each volunteer.

At the outset, some indicated a preference for working behind the scenes, stating frankly that they were not at ease with mental patients. Others had pre-schoolers at home. They expressed a desire to help by baking cookies and birthday cakes for patients' children, taking youngsters to the Zoo and helping with the shopping while mothers were hospitalized. These home-based volunteers also create tally sheets for group games and contribute other accessories needed for entertainment activities at the hospital.

Volunteers who chose to work where the action is found plenty of it in both acute and convalescent units. Many work individually, driving three or four patients on field trips to parks and public buildings. They also perform miscellaneous services, making phone calls and writing greeting cards and letters for patients unable to write.

Volunteer group activities include planning and coordinating special events such as Valentine and Christmas parties, summer square dances. The latest is a pool tournament made possible by the purchase of three brand new bumper pool tables through a grant from the United Jaycette Fund, requested by the Greendale Jaycettes. The arrival of the three pool tables and a new kiln, also purchased through the grant, was heralded by a recognition tea for the Jaycettes given by St. Mary's Hill Hospital.

Two former teachers volunteered to instruct in their chosen fields. One teaches ceramics, now the most popular course in the hospital's occupational therapy program. The other directs a physical education program, which meets on Wednesday nights every other week.

Emergency Psychiatric Telephone Counselors were the second volunteer corps to be mobilized and implemented at a mental hospital by the Milwaukee County Association for Mental Health. This was also the first service of its kind in Wisconsin to be structured in a private or public hospital. The logical place and the most needed for such a volunteer program was the Milwaukee County Mental Health Center, where a full-time volunteer direc-

tor had recently been installed through a recommendation by the Association.

Four training sessions in April of 1967, each about two and one-half hours long, were held with the volunteer group at the Mental Health Center. Two psychiatrists, a psychologist and the director of psychiatric social services took turns meeting with the group during a four-week orientation period. Hospital procedures, resource referrals, descriptions of kinds of telephone calls to expect, the confidential nature of the service, and methods of detecting a genuine suicide threat on the telephone, were emphasized at the meetings. Question and answer periods followed.

Helen Carey, director of psychiatric social services, says, "The volunteer must have a genuine interest in people, must have time available to serve and a sense of responsibility toward her job. She must also be willing to use the necessary supervision from hospital staff to be effective."

On May 1 the eleven volunteers went to work weekday afternoons, Monday through Friday, 12:00 noon to 4:00 p.m., peak periods for emergency telephone calls at the Mental Health Center, serving four hours every other week.

About 40% of the calls received are informational in nature and the volunteer corps relies heavily on "Doors to Daylight," an informational and referral directory of resources in Milwaukee County published as a public service by the Mental Health Association.

Emergency calls come from former mental patients, relatives of troubled persons, actual suicidal persons, inquiries regarding mental hospital costs, attorneys seeking information for clients, mothers and school teachers reporting strange behavior of children.

A third volunteer program for the mentally ill in Milwaukee County started following the expansion of the psychiatric clinic at St. Michael private general hospital through a grant from a private foundation. Margaret Walter, clinic director, also stresses the well-trained volunteer.

The training program started in fall of 1966 was supervised by the director of volunteers. There were five 2-hour meetings before the St. Michael Outpatient Mental Health Clinic volunteers

were put to work. They had been hand-picked for the job, but still needed to be clinic-oriented, tour the hospital, learn hospital procedures and ethics, recognize types of patients they would be working with, where their work would begin and end.

Meanwhile, in addition to the five orientation sessions for one year, the group of women have attended all staff meetings every Tuesday morning, which consist of two parts: 1) Case studies and planning for patients; 2) Teaching conferences, using a multidisciplinary approach, covering psychiatry, social work, psychology, nursing, clergy counselors and vocational rehabilitation counselors. Volunteers also attend sessions for nursing school students who come to St. Michael Mental Health Clinic for psychiatric orientation, as well as a summer course for pastoral counselors.

The volunteers, each working four hours a week, are now able to handle telephone inquiries, do the initial interviewing at the Outpatient Mental Health Clinic, and write up a history of the patients, determining if there is a need for financial help, and if patients are eligible for the Mental Health Clinic or should be referred to other hospital resources. In initial interviews, volunteers sometimes pick up family problems of alcoholism and emotional illness.

Results of the three "in-depth" trained volunteer corps are indeed gratifying. The mental patient is receiving higher levels of services; the volunteer is performing according to her skills and interest; and hospital and clinic staffs are now beginning to say "we couldn't keep going without them."