

In 1930 the Mental Treatment Act was passed; its outstanding feature included the extension of the voluntary patient status to the rate-aided channels, in which hitherto early treatment in the form of voluntary admission had been denied. This enabled patients to enter the county mental hospitals as voluntary patients, so long as they could express volition on admission, it being only necessary for them to sign a form stating they were willing to enter the hospital and would abide by the rules. They could discharge themselves by giving 72 hours' notice in writing.

In addition, this new Act created the status of temporary patient, in which volition could not be exercised by the patient; it enabled the patient to avoid the stigma of certification for a limited period.

This new Act enabled all types of patients to enter hospital as temporary patients, and instead of being certified, they entered with two recommendations signed by doctors, one of their own usual doctors in attendance and the other a doctor approved by the Board of Control.

The patient is admitted for six months on this order, but it can, if necessary, be extended another six months in two three-monthly intervals.

Should the patient not recover within the twelve months allowed by this temporary order, he may be certified in the usual way, if the relatives are agreeable.

The form of application being similar to this copy:—

VOLUNTARY PATIENTS

NOTICE

A Voluntary Patient is a Patient who is admitted for treatment at her own request and it is hoped therefore, that you will give the doctor your full confidence, in order that you may receive the best possible treatment for your illness.

You may leave the Hospital at any time after giving the Superintendent three days' notice of your intention to do so, but it must be understood that whilst in the Hospital you undertake to conform to the various rules and regulations for the proper conduct of the Hospital.

Should any cause for complaint arise, you should bring the matter to the attention of the Superintendent.

APPLICATION

Having read the above Notice, I, the undersigned, hereby request to be allowed to be received into the above-named Hospital as a Voluntary Patient for treatment.

I promise to conform to the rules and regulations of the Hospital so long as I am residing there.

Signed

Dated

Many of the patients are discharged recovered before the twelve months expire, while others may be taken out of the hospital by a responsible relative.

Previous to this new Act only registered hospitals and private mental hospitals admitted voluntary boarders.

If a certified patient escapes from the mental hospital, he may be taken back without any fresh certification or reception order if he is apprehended within fourteen days in England, and twenty-eight days in Scotland.

By the Lunacy Act of 1890 any wilful mis-statement made by the medical examiner is a misdemeanour in law, and punishable as such.

Except in cases mentioned in the Lunacy Act, 1890, no person shall be allowed to remain in a workhouse as a lunatic unless the Medical Officer of the workhouse certifies in writing that:—

- (A) the person is a lunatic; with the grounds for the opinion; and
- (B) that he is a proper person to be allowed to remain in a workhouse as a
- (C) lunatic, and that the accommodation in the workhouse is sufficient for his proper care and treatment separate from those inmates of the workhouse who are not lunatics, unless the Medical Officer certifies that the lunatic's condition is such that it is not necessary for the convenience of the lunatic or of the other inmates that he should be kept separate.

Under the Mental Deficiency Act the following forms are required to place a patient under care.

In the case of an idiot or imbecile, two medical certificates must be furnished, one of which must be from a medical man approved by the Local Authority under the Act, or by the Board of Control, and a statement from the relative or guardian. In cases where the defective is not an idiot or imbecile, two medical certificates as for an idiot and also one from the Judicial Authority as for the ordinary reception order on petition, are necessary.

Most local authorities appoint a committee for the care of their mental defectives.

Should a mental defective be found wandering in the streets with no visible means of support, or be found to have been badly treated or neglected, he is placed in a proper institution by the Local Authority. The local education authority ascertain whether he is able to receive benefit or instruction in a special school.

Or he may be placed under guardianship. This may be undertaken by the parent or guardian if the defective is under twenty-one.

As recently as 1914 mental defectives were housed in the county mental hospitals, and some still are.

Permanent educational homes and institutions under medical management with special facilities for teaching them handiwork and crafts are now in use.

The Board of Guardians were given power by the Poor Law Acts of 1889 and 1899 to adopt children in certain cases, and if they were mental defectives, to obtain proper institutional care for them.

It was also in 1889 that the Elementary Education Act was passed which made provision for defective and epileptic children.

A further Act of 1914 bearing the same title made it compulsory for the authorities to make provision for children under seven years of age, to have special schools for them and, if necessary, included the boarding and lodging for them.

Provision for the reception of mental defectives may be made in certified houses or institutions or private houses. Defectives who are dangerous or violent may be sent to a state institution; whichever way he is detained, the patient has to be reconsidered periodically by the visiting justices.

The Mental Deficiency Act of 1913 was the result of the labours of the Royal Commission for the care and control of the feeble-minded, which issued its report in 1908 and repealed the Idiots Act of 1886.

Every patient in a mental hospital has the right to have any letter sent unopened to the visiting Committee, of the hospital, or any member of the committee, to the Board of Control, to the Lord Chancellor, to the Minister of Health or to the person who signed the reception order. Also, in the case of private patients, an unopened letter may be sent to the person on whose petition such order was made, or to any Chancery visitor or the Judge (under 53 Vict. cap. 5), who deals with property.

By the Local Government Act, 1929, the Board of Guardians was abolished and its powers transferred to the council of county or county borough, which included the work of the public assistance department, consisting of out-relief, institutional relief and general administration,

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