

## I Was a Mental Patient

# Ward Miseries Are Worse for Women

*After receiving many complaints about the Kings County Hospital's psychiatric division, the World-Telegram assigned staff writer Michael Mok to investigate. Without the knowledge of any authorities, he won admission as a patient after telling a carefully prepared story of emotional difficulties. He was there eight days before he was discharged. Today he tells the story of a woman whose experiences in the building were even worse than his.*

By **MICHAEL MOK,**

*World-Telegram Staff Writer.*

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The psychiatric division of Kings County Hospital is like a vortex in which people spin for a time and then are either sucked under or cast out. Life in this institutional whirlpool is infinitely more horrifying to women than it is to men.

My stay in the locked wards was the direct result of scores of letters this newspaper received from former patients of Kings County.

One of these detailed the experiences of a sane woman, who was admitted to "G" Building suffering from depression brought on by menopause.

For 12 days she lived in the center of the vortex: She saw senile women, tied in wheelchairs, who helplessly fouled their gowns all day long.

She saw little girls — the youngest 9—living

among sex exhibitionists, drunks, dope addicts and desperately disturbed women of all sorts.

She learned what it means to do without towels, makeup, toilet paper, and how it feels to sit for hours on the cold floor.

I interviewed this woman, who now holds a responsible position with a large Manhattan corporation, in three three-hour sessions over a week.

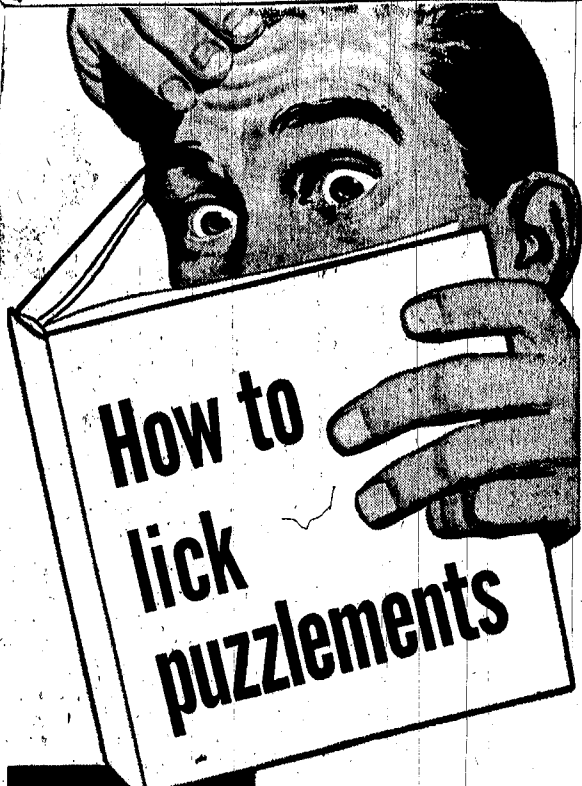
This is her story:

On admission, all her clothes, including girdle and bra, were taken away, and she was given a wrapper many sizes too large for her. She wanted to keep her comb and compact but these, along with her wedding ring were also confiscated.

Once in the ward, it was bedtime and she was shown to a sour-smelling bed and given an old blanket. The beds were so close together it was almost possible to roll from one onto another.

She had a chance to look around the next morning. There were six seatless toilets for 80 women and girls. Toilet paper was usually unavailable. When it came time to dry after showers, towels consisting of three-yard strips were passed from woman to woman

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**How to lick puzzlements**

**Tear out this fashion check list of what's right for Spring**



U. E. Gallanos, advertising executive, prefers "Designer Group" natural shoulder.



Thomas Ahern, American Airlines, approves new "Designer Group" clear finish worsted.



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**The lapels:**

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**Expert Maps Wide Study of Kings County**

Dr. Lawrence C. Kolb, nationally known psychiatrist designated to investigate substandard conditions at Kings County Hospital, today promised a ward-by-ward study of deficiencies disclosed by World-Telegram reporter Michael Mok.

Dr. Kolb, who is director of the New York State Psychiatric Institute and chairman of the department of psychiatry at the College of Physicians and Surgeons at Columbia University, arrived here late yesterday from a professional meeting in New Orleans.

He was named last week by Dr. Ray E. Trussell, city hospitals commissioner, to head a blue-ribbon committee to probe unsatisfactory conditions, not only in Kings County Hospital, but in the psychiatric divisions of all municipal hospitals.

Dr. Paul H. Hoch, state commissioner of mental hygiene, has told me that he would lend me one of his top staff members for the committee, but beyond that I don't know about its composition," Dr. Kolb said.

"I can tell you, however, that we will want to spend time on every ward; that we will want to talk to patients, doctors, social workers and others who come in contact with patients.

"We will want to check physical facilities, inspect clinical records to ascertain the adequacy of medical and psychiatric care and review the tables of organization. We will want to survey the methods by which patients are committed to state institutions or returned to the community."

**Why Not More Money?**

Dr. Kolb, who is a slim, athletic man with a Southern accent, deplored the lack of creature comforts in city hospitals, especially in mental hospitals.

"Why don't you ask yourself sometime: Why is it that so little money from philanthropic organizations is earmarked for mental institutions?" Dr. Kolb remarked.

"We're starting to get money for research and the like, but none for those little comforts so important to sick persons. Volunteers Need Director.

"I think that city hospitals also should have an effective volunteer program. But it isn't enough just to open the doors of the hospitals to well-meaning people. There has to be a director of volunteers who knows what he is about. And that sort of person usually must be paid, because channeling the efforts of volunteers is a full-time job.

"Again we come up against the problem of money . . ."

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until they were sodden. As in the men's wards, the dormitories were locked during the day and exhausted women slept on the floor.

Theft was a problem here, too. Women who had combs and compacts (brought by visitors) carried them around all day long because to put them down was to have them stolen.

On visiting days, an attendant came around with a box containing lipstick, nail polish and cotton swabs. Her appearance always touched off a wild scramble for the cosmetics.

**Attendants Scarce.**

But meals were the worst part of the routine. In a rank around the tables were placed the wheel chairs of those too sick or senile to feed themselves.

"I helped to feed them," she said. "Sometimes they would throw up in my face or dirty themselves during the meal. There weren't enough attendants to take care of them, and unless some of us helped, they just wouldn't have gotten fed."

She was always acutely aware that children in the ward were present during the most unpleasant events.

"There was a girl of about 11 who came to us from the violent ward. She carried a doll and crayons wherever she went. She used to fly into rages for no reason and use severer than the language which, I suppose, she learned from the older women.

"There was also a young woman who thought she had killed Christ. She used to scream and tear off her wrapper, and I don't suppose her antics were any too good for the children.

**Pride Is Lost.**

"I was also very impressed by a woman who spoke in an extremely cultured voice and was friendly to me when I first came.

"Before I left, she was lying down on the floor just like the rest. It upset me to see her like that, or diving after a cigaret butt, and I told her so. But she just didn't care any more.

"The woman who slept in the bed next to mine is also hard to forget. She murdered her husband night after night in her sleep. To listen to her screams of rage you could almost believe she was doing it.

"Another thing: one of the corridors in our ward was filled with eatebled women on cots, under oxygen tents, taking intravenous feeding. For the life of me I don't know what they were doing there. If they were mental cases, they were certainly too weak to do themselves or anyone else any harm."

She recalled that the beds were all pushed into one of the dormitories and locked away during the day. At night they were brought out, and it seemed to me we got them on a first come, first served basis.

"Those filthy beds used to prey on my mind. I used to try and mark mine in various ways, but I don't believe I ever got the same one twice. For three nights it was so crowded that I had to sleep out in the hall, and the light was on all night long."

**Three-Minute Interview.**

She said she received no psychological tests during her stay in Kings County, no medication, and saw a psychiatrist just twice in 12 days.

"The first time I was taken to the office of a woman doctor. I was embarrassed because I was wearing a dirty, wrinkled wrapper and she was dressed in a suit and blouse and looked very chic.

"She asked if I knew my name, what year it was, and

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what did I think was wrong with me. The interview lasted about three minutes. She ended it abruptly by saying: "That's all."

"The second time I was called into her office was so she could tell me that my husband had arranged for private care for me, and that I would be released.

"I thought about the woman in a strait jacket I had seen crawling around the ward like an animal, of the old women in wheelchairs, begging to be let back to bed, and I felt as if an immense weight had fallen from me."

"But, beloved as I was, I couldn't help but be angry: Why isn't there a place for people like me to get themselves together, and why isn't there a special place for the children?"

**TOMORROW:** How to correct what's wrong in Building G.

**Plan Offered to Spur Mental Treatments**

Dr. Paul H. Hoch, State Commissioner of Mental Hygiene, last night proposed a plan which would enable Kings County and Bellevue Hospitals to offer psychiatric treatment rather than serve merely as processing centers for state institutions.

Dr. Hoch's proposal came after staff writer Michael Mok revealed in his World-Telegram series, "I Was a Mental Patient," that he received no treatment during an eight-day stay in Kings County Hospital and the possibility of commitment to a state hospital appeared to depend on a 20-minute interview with a psychiatrist.

Speaking before the Bronx County Society for Mental Health, Dr. Hoch outlined a plan for the establishment of mental health districts in the city which would enable Kings County and Bellevue Hospitals to offer inpatient and outpatient hospital and clinical services to residents on a city-state coordinated basis.

A major advantage of his plan, Dr. Hoch explained, was the reduction in the delay in treatment of the mentally ill. At present, he said, virtually all patients are sent to either Bellevue or Kings County Hospital for decisions on whether



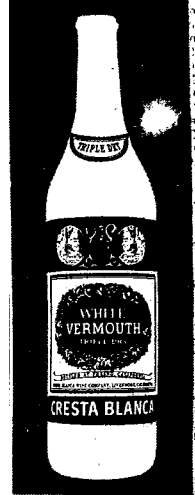
DR. PAUL H. HOCH.

they should be admitted to a state hospital.

"This delay is unfortunate," the commissioner said, "since it represents the most crucial period, immediately following the onset of the disease, when treatment is most effective and chances for recovery are best."

Dr. Hoch addressed the Society after receiving its annual citation for "distinguished leadership in the field of mental health."

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