THE PRE-INDUSTRIAL VALUE OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY IN MENTAL HOSPITALS

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From time immemorial it has been known that idleness brings only discontent. When this state of mind develops in those who have not been classed as insane, what will result from enforced idleness within the confines of a mental hospital in those who have been committed for care and treatment? The answer is obvious.

To make life worth while for those unfortunately taken from their busy surroundings owing to altered social adjustments, a graded system of employment has been instituted in many hospitals caring for mental cases. This graded system of employment has been devised for the more deteriorated class of patients who cannot be employed in various departments of hospital upkeep. In order to make clear the purpose of this system, it has been termed "occupational therapy," or occupation as a therapeutic aid to bring the individual back to his normal standard.

It should be made clear that this branch of therapeutics is entirely separate from the department of industrial occupation. In this latter division the various activities of hospital routine such as farm, garden, mechanical, etc., can be classed. The patient personnel making up the industrial section is drawn from those who have not been plunged into the depths of mental chaos and need little stimulation to arouse their interests.

After the department for occupational therapy at the Chicago State Hospital had been fairly well established, the mental condition of many patients was improved so that they could be transferred to the industrial activities. Some of the patients so transferred were able to carry on; others began to slip and were compelled to return to class work or enforced idleness and deterioration. In order to aid those who were so liable to slip,
an intermediate department of occupation, less complicated than industrial work, was instituted.

For this department the name "pre-industrial occupation" was suggested.

An investigation was made to determine the cause or causes why patients graduating, as it were, from the occupational therapy classes could not do tasks in the industrial department of the hospital.

The first problem that came to our notice was the fact that it was not the fault of the patients so advanced, but that of the employees in charge of the industrial occupations. These employees had not the patience or special training to deal with the situation that existed.

The second problem was found to be the change in the character of work. In order to overcome these difficulties and care for patients who otherwise would be idle, the new department was opened in November, 1921.

One room adjacent to the occupational center was made available for the new class. This room was formerly an old coal bunker house and has a floor space of 1883 square feet.

The equipment consists of looms for weaving of several types, i.e., two Cambridge, five Ideal, and four harness looms, one made over fly shuttle loom, and three made in the institution; tables and chairs for the willow workers and brush makers, with a tub for soaking willows, and tools for brush making.

The nature of occupation carried on is weaving, brush making of all kinds, and willow work.

The material used for weaving consists for the greater part of rags from the laundry castoffs and the condemning room, such as old sheets, pillow cases, shirts, stockings, bed ticking, burlap bags, and scraps from the sewing room and tailor shop.

The rags are dyed various colors and it has been observed that patients much prefer to use the bright colors than white or the dull shades. Several patients are employed to prepare the dyed rags for weaving; these patients refuse to do anything but sew the ends of the rags together. If they were not doing this, their days would be spent in doing nothing but sitting with hands folded, giving heed to their delusional ideas.
We noticed some patients who grew tired of sewing and liked to change their occupation to the cutting of the rags into strips. This they are permitted to do.

All these activities help to make the hospital residence of a group of patients a pleasure so far as the patient is concerned, and are of some economical value to the state, the rugs woven being used by the institution.

In the brush making department waste material such as wood from packing boxes is used to a great extent. The backs and fiber for the floor brushes is supplied by purchase. Not only floor brushes but all the scrubbing brushes and shoe brushes are made in the pre-industrial room. It has been observed that patients take a great deal of pleasure in combining the black, gray, and white horse hair in different ways when making the shoe brushes. Truly, one can say that this diversion is much better than doing nothing.

The willow work furnishes occupation of a nature that brings out the patient's application and attention. Basketry is by no means simple; it requires strength, skill, and patience on the part of the individual to learn, and on the part of the instructor to teach.

The type of occupation carried in the pre-industrial section of any mental hospital need not be limited to the activities heretofore mentioned; the field is extensive, depending on the number of patients available.

Our department is entirely too small. More patients than can be used are developed in the occupational therapy classes. For this reason, those who become hospital residents for a long period are compelled to remain in the occupational therapy classes because if not given attention, they soon relapse into mental stagnation.

The primary object of pre-industrial work is not the finished rugs, baskets, etc., produced, but the keeping of one's interest stimulated who can not otherwise be employed.

It is of interest to watch a mental case with active auditory hallucinosis busy himself passing the shuttle back and forth while weaving. This individual would not in all probability be able to take part in work of a more intelligent character, and
no doubt would not show interest in his occupation owing to lack of stimulation.

The physical side of a patient's life is also improved by the opportunity he has for changing from ward idleness to activity. To better bring this about, it is advisable to have the pre-industrial class or classes conducted in a separate building from that in which the patient eats and sleeps. By so doing he gets exercise out of doors while going back and forth to his employment.

While, as stated, the primary object of pre-industrial work is the development of the patient mentally and physically, the economic value to the hospital is improved. All articles produced can be used in other departments of the hospital. While our pre-industrial department is only in its infancy, it has come to be looked upon as a source of supply for other departments.

The institution housekeeper has received in the past two years 2031 yards of carpet and 25 Hartshorn rugs made on the looms described.

True, this may not seem much, but it must be borne in mind that the patients are not rushed in their work but allowed to take their time.

The storekeeper has received 2064 scrub brushes. A short time ago he made requisition for shoe brushes; so far 42 have been furnished him.

The patients doing willow work have completed 662 baskets of different types.

The instructors in this department have observed that the patients prefer weaving and brush making to working with the willows. This is no doubt due to the fact that willow work requires strength.

The value of the pre-industrial department may be divided into two divisions; first, the mental and physical improvement of patients who have been brought up through occupational classes and can not carry on in industrial occupations; second, the end results of their production become articles that can be used in other departments of the hospital.

Therefore, both the patients so employed and the hospital in general derive a benefit from pre-industrial work.