

### III—WARDENS IN HOSTELS FOR THE MENTALLY HANDICAPPED

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#### 1. Introduction

Little has been written about the problems faced by Wardens in hostels (or residential homes) for the mentally handicapped; yet personal experience would suggest that they are subject to considerable stresses of various kinds. This pilot study, carried out in 1974, attempted to look at some of their problems, including such points as career-structure, degree of autonomy, availability of support and personal living conditions.

The study was done by means of a postal questionnaire, and may suffer from the defects of such a method. The total number of "target" Wardens who received questionnaires was 37, and 30 of these replied—i.e., 81%. Some questions proved to have been worded ambiguously, so that the answers could not be classified. In many cases, no answers were given to one or more questions. Finally, there were several open-ended questions which evoked such a variety of different answers that it was impossible to categorise them.

Nonetheless, if this can be regarded as a pilot study only, some of the findings are of interest and may point the way to further studies in this field—a field which will become of increasing importance as more residential homes for the mentally handicapped are opened in the community. Such developments will be in line with Cmnd. 4683, "Better Services for the Mentally Handicapped," although the present economic climate has temporarily halted progress. Perhaps advantage can be taken of this lull to identify the problems and stresses of the Wardens, and to look afresh at future planning and training programmes with a view to minimising their difficulties.

#### 2. The Hostels

Out of the 30, 23 were run by Social Service Departments in all parts of England and Wales. 3 were run by the Wessex Regional Hospital Board (now Regional Health Authority), and 4 by the Spastics Society catering for the physically rather than the mentally handicapped.

24 hostels were for adults and 6 for children, and this ratio of 4:1 is typical of the national distribution of residential homes for the mentally handicapped. 19 of the 24 hostels catered for both sexes, as did all the children's hostels.

All of the hostels offered long-term care, but none offered short-term care only. 11 did offer short-term care facilities alongside long-term care, and one offered "short-term care and rehabilitation." Only 9 out of the 30 hostels provided Day Care facilities for handicapped people living in the community. (This would seem to be a useful additional service which hostels could provide, especially as most residents leave the hostel for all or part of each day from Monday to Friday. The arguments advanced against such a provision are two-fold: firstly, the staff need a break after the work of getting the residents up and ready for Special School, Adult Training Centre or work; and secondly, it is unreasonable to assume that the handicapped persons' home should be used by someone else during the day.)

The hostels varied in size: none had less than 12 residents and none more than 34. The commonest number was 21-25 (13 hostels), and 5 had 25 residents. Only 1 hostel had 34 residents, and 6 had 15 or less.

The staffing ratios in the hostels were calculated, excluding the Warden. Additional staff included houseparents, cooks, deputy wardens and domestics. In exactly half of the hostels the ratio of staff to residents was less than 1:3.1. In 3 cases the ratio of staff to residents was 1:0.9; and the poorest ratio was 1:12.

### 3. Some General Facts about the Wardens

#### (i) Age

1 Warden was under 29, 8 were aged between 30 and 39, 14 were between 40 and 49, 6 were between 50 and 59, and 1 did not divulge her age. None was over 60.

#### (ii) Previous Training

22 of the 30 Wardens had background experience or training in nursing (see Figure).

Qualification	RNMS only	RMN only	SRN only	SEN only	Nursing Assistant only	RNMS & RMN	RNMS & SRN	RMN & SRN	
No.	2	3	4	2	3	4	1	3	22

Note: (i) RNMS=Registered Nurse in Mental Subnormality.  
(ii) RMN =Registered Mental Nurse.  
(iii) SRN =State Registered Nurse.  
(iv) SEN =State Enrolled Nurse.

6 of the 22 had additional training, 3 of them on in-service courses in residential care work. 1 had done a year's course at the Institute of Group Analysis, another had trained as a District Nurse, and the other had the N.A.M.H. Diploma and the Training Council Teaching Diploma for the Mentally Handicapped.

Of the remaining 8 Wardens, 5 had no previous relevant training or experience, and 3 had had training leading to the Certificate in Residential Social Work.

#### (iii) Length of Time in Hostel Work

12 Wardens had worked in hostels for the mentally handicapped for over 6 years (one had worked in one for 15 years). 7 had been in hostel work (not necessarily as Warden) for less than 2 years. The other 11 Wardens had worked in hostels for between 3 and 5 years.

#### (iv) Reasons for taking up Post as Hostel Warden

This was an open-ended question, and so the answers have been classified somewhat arbitrarily into positive and negative reasons, with inevitably a "mixed" group in which negative and positive reasons seemed to be about equally divided.

As examples of positive reasons for wanting to do hostel work, answers such as the following have been included: "Less restrictive than hospital work. More opportunity to put into practice and work through to a conclusion one's own ideas."

Examples of predominantly negative reasons are: "Previous job had stagnated and little could be achieved," or "Needed a job with accommodation for wife and self."

A "mixed" reason was, for example, "Needed accommodation and liked caring for people in informal, home-like surroundings."

If these categorisations are accepted as reasonable, then the reasons given were predominantly positive in 19 cases, mainly negative in 7 cases, mixed in 3 cases (and 1 did not answer this question).

#### **4. Factors related to Job-satisfaction for the Warden as Manager**

7 factors were studied which it was thought might be important in ensuring job-satisfaction for the Warden, considered in a managerial role. On the first 6 factors, the majority of Wardens had favourable conditions. Thus, 28 were always or usually allowed to plan and develop their own policy for the hostel: and 29 were allowed to take direct responsibility for the day-to-day running of the hostel. 28 Wardens were always involved in selection of staff: and 23 had a say in the selection of residents. 21 Wardens were able to give in-service training to their staff: and 20 took part in multi-disciplinary assessment of their residents.

The seventh factor concerned recruitment and retention of staff, and 16 out of the 30 Wardens had problems on this score. This was the first clear problem to emerge, and half of the Wardens made positive suggestions for encouraging recruitment and retention of staff. 5 said that the staff career-structure needed to be improved, 3 Wardens felt that payment for overtime would act as an incentive, and 1 said that pay in general should be improved. 6 Wardens said that advertisement of the posts should emphasise the job-satisfaction to be gained in this work, and another thought that living accommodation for staff should be improved.

#### **5. Support received by Wardens from Various Sources**

Detailed information was obtained about the frequency of contact with the general practitioner with whom the residents were registered, with the Warden's immediate superior, with the medical specialist in mental handicap, and (in the case of the children's hostels) with the paediatrician. A general question was then asked: "Do you feel that you get help quickly enough with general medical, psychiatric and management problems in the hostel?" 27 Wardens had sufficient help with general medical problems, and 22 felt that help with general management problems was adequate (this in spite of the fact that 19 of them saw their immediate superior only once a month or less often than that). However, only 16 Wardens felt they had adequate psychiatric help, and 13 stated that they did not get psychiatric help quickly enough. This indicates a need for the specialist in mental handicap to make himself readily available to the Hostel Warden: it is an important support mechanism and does not take up a lot of time. 12 of these Wardens had no contact at all with a consultant in mental handicap, but 8 were able to get help from a general psychiatrist.

Incidentally, in the 6 children's hostels, 2 Wardens had no contact at all with a paediatrician and only 1 had regular contact. The other 3 had contact with the paediatrician "when required."

#### **6. Working Hours and Leisure Time for the Wardens**

The mean number of hours worked each week by the Wardens in this sample was 49.9: 13 worked more than this and 16 less. (1 respondent stated that the number of hours varied so much from week to week that no specific answer could be given.) The lowest number of hours worked by a Warden was 40, whilst 2 Wardens claimed that they worked 70 hours each week.

An attempt was made to ascertain how many hours the Wardens were "on call and liable to be disturbed" over and above their stated working hours, because 27 of them actually lived in the hostel and were therefore potentially at risk for most of each 24 hours. Unfortunately no meaningful answer could be obtained. Nevertheless, 16 Wardens felt they had sufficient time for leisure pursuits, although 13 did not and 1 did not answer. No firm conclusion can be drawn as to whether the Wardens felt they had enough time to themselves.

However, some clue to the Warden's private time is provided by the answers to the questions: "How often are you able to get away from the hostel completely?" and "For how long can you get away?" The 3 non-resident Wardens got away each

day. Of the other 27, 15 managed to get away completely once a week or more often, 10 got away once a fortnight or more often, and 2 only "very occasionally." 8 were away for a few hours only, whereas 11 were able to take a full day, and the other 11 were away for more than one day.

With regard to holidays, 14 of the 30 Wardens had 4 weeks each year. 9 had more than this (4 had 5 weeks and 5 had 6 weeks); whilst 7 had less than 4 weeks, including 2 Wardens who said they had been unable to take any holiday at all.

(It is interesting in connection with leisure-time to read the "Memorandum by the Home Office on the Conduct of Children's Homes," issued by H.M.S.O. in 1952. In Para. 9 it recommends that conditions should be such as to enable the staff to "retain pleasure and freshness in their work." There should be adequate time off and holidays, but enough flexibility in the arrangements to ensure continuity of care. Identical comments could apply today to the conditions of Wardens in hostels for the mentally handicapped).

### **7. Warden's Accommodation**

3 Wardens were non-resident. Of the 27 who lived in the hostel, 18 had a separate entrance, whilst 9 had to use the same entrance as the residents. Of these 9, 7 said they would have preferred a separate entrance.

Resident Wardens were asked about the number of private rooms available to them, excluding bathroom and kitchen. 19 of the 27 said they had an adequate number of private rooms; 8 said they had not.

### **8. Career-structure and Responsibilities**

12 of the Wardens felt that their career-structure was adequate, whereas 18 felt it was not.

17 Wardens would have liked more general responsibility than they have at present, and only 2 would like less. 6 said the amount of responsibility was about right, and 5 did not answer.

All Wardens are responsible for much of the budgetting in their hostel, and a specific question was asked about this aspect. 12 wanted more responsibility for the budgetting and 16 wanted less. 1 gave no answer, and the other thought the present responsibility was about right.

### **9. Wardens' Views of Job-satisfaction and of Hostel Work**

20 Wardens found their present job more satisfying and rewarding than previous work, and 7 found it "about the same." Only 2 found it less satisfying. (1 did not answer.)

However, only 9 of the 30 Wardens expressed a desire to remain in hostel work. A further 11 wanted to remain in the mental handicap field in a different capacity—as field social worker, Homes Advisor, or teacher of students in residential social work. 4 said positively that they would like to leave hostel work, and 6 did not reply.

These latter two findings are worthy of comment and perhaps further study. Although  $\frac{2}{3}$  (20 out of 30) found the job more satisfying than previous work, only  $\frac{1}{3}$  (9 out of 30) expressed a positive wish to continue as hostel Wardens. If these findings proved to be widely applicable, one would need to ask "Why?" Two possible reasons are:

- (i) The Wardens have found satisfaction in creating the hostel as they wanted it to be, and then have become less interested in continuing to run it on a day-to-day basis.

- (ii) The constant stresses involved in intimate daily contact with the mentally handicapped mean that hostel Wardens cannot be expected to continue as such for an indefinite period.

It seems unlikely that much can be done to help if the first reason is correct, i.e., if the Wardens are much more interested in creating than in running a service. However, if the main reason is that Wardens find the stress too great after a certain time, then it should be possible to help them by providing more support from outside the hostel, by ensuring that they have fewer problems with staff recruitment and retention, and by enabling them to have more leisure-time. It may help if fewer actually lived on the premises; and it seems fairly certain that those who do should have a separate entrance, so that they are not confronted with the residents the moment they return.

The remaining points are based on answers to open-ended questions.

## 10. Further Training

2 open questions concerned further training, which had been undertaken by 17 of the respondents, but not by the other 13. Only 3 Wardens considered that further training was unnecessary. Several Wardens gave more than one answer in the open-ended questions, and some gave none.

One question was: "What do you consider were the most valuable aspects of further training?" 10 thought the interchange of ideas was an important aspect; and 10 said they had gained a greater understanding of, and communication with, other workers. 6 Wardens had gained an increased knowledge of mental handicap; and 2 said that the time made available during the training had enabled them to look more objectively at standards of care within their own hostels.

In answer to the question: "What further training do you consider would be most useful?" 6 Wardens mentioned a training in field social work, 8 suggested a training in residential social work, and 4 thought a training in personnel management would be most useful.

## 11. Elaboration of Problem Areas in the Hostel Warden's Work

18 Wardens answered an open-ended question which asked them to elaborate on the areas in which they found most problems. Many replies reflected local difficulties, and the problems tended to be so individual that they could not be grouped into specific categories. However, on one problem there was something approaching a general view—12 out of the 18 said that one of their main problem areas was that of staff-recruitment. This reinforces the finding from the direct question, when 16 out of the 30 Wardens said they had difficulties with recruitment and retention of staff. It is an area which merits further study.

On a slightly different open-ended question, in which the Wardens were asked to comment on difficult areas in their work, the answers were again highly individual; but 5 out of 14 who answered said they had inadequate communication with field social workers.

## 12. Worries about the Future

A final open-ended question asked: "What are your major worries about the future?" Only 1 Warden did not answer this question, and 6 stated specifically that they had no worries.

The remaining 23 respondents produced a total of 38 answers—and of these 38, only 9 reflected personal worries of the Wardens. Among these latter, the com-

monest (6 answers) was concern about accommodation for retirement, and 2 others were concerned about pension rights.

The other 29 answers were all concerned with what might be termed "altruistic worries"—with worries about the future prospects for the mentally handicapped, the faulty public attitudes on the subject, and with worries that there would be a lack of suitable facilities to enable the Wardens to give adequate care.

### **Discussion**

It would be meaningless to try and draw too many conclusions from a pilot study. Perhaps the most interesting result is the somewhat paradoxical finding that, although 19 Wardens out of 29 gave a positive reason for going into the work, and although 20 out of 30 found the job more satisfying than previous work, nevertheless only 9 out of 30 wanted to remain as Hostel Wardens.

This would be disturbing if found to be more universally true, and it may be related to some of the difficulties mentioned in the replies. There seems to be a real problem related to the recruitment and retention of staff (which is probably related in turn to the lack of a definite career-structure for workers in the hostel). Moreover, 18 of the 30 Wardens felt their own career-structure was inadequate. The working hours are long (the mean was nearly 50 hours/week in this study); and yet 17 out of 25 Wardens who replied to the specific question said they would like more responsibility in general. If the Warden lives on the premises, a private entrance would seem to be essential (but need the Warden be resident?). There was a plea for more adequate communication with Field Social Workers, to whom the residential Wardens feel somehow "inferior" in status. Is this partly perhaps because such a large number of Wardens (22 out of 30) have a nursing, rather than a social work background? Finally, psychiatric support seems inadequate, but again this may be related to the fact that 13 of the Wardens had trained in general psychiatric or mental handicap hospitals where psychiatric help would be readily available.

It is important to get conditions right for Wardens in hostels for the mentally handicapped, because the number of such hostels will increase when money becomes more readily available again. It is a demanding job, and the fact that only  $\frac{1}{3}$  of those questioned in the present study want to remain as Hostel Wardens indicates that all is not well. Further studies seem justified on the basis of this pilot study, preferably using a personal interview technique.

The replies to the open-ended questions indicated that many problems tend to be local and specific. One way to help might be to have regular meetings of Wardens at which they could discuss their difficulties and help each other to solve them.

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