

Lesson 1

READ THIS STORY #2, Advanced

Mental Health Reform

Sometimes, reform based on humanitarian principles fails to produce the intended result. Such has been the case with the reform in mental health care that started in the 1960's.

With the development of psychotropic drugs, it was believed that individuals with psychiatric illnesses could gradually be returned to their communities. It was decided that our state mental institutions had become archaic “warehouses.” People felt that morally and legally, we had an obligation to release those patients so that they could live a more normal life. It was expected that community-based support networks would be in place to insure that the basic needs of the former mental patients would be met.

Unfortunately, that didn't happen. States, eagerly anticipating the savings that would accrue when the institutions were closed, forced mental hospitals to empty their rooms. But very few support networks were established. Those that were opened often had long waiting lists.

No one anticipated the cost of community-based care, and neither the states nor the Federal Government provided the necessary funding. So former patients had to fend for themselves, and often became homeless or victims of crime.

Officials now feel it might be less expensive, and more humanitarian, to re-open the mental health hospitals.