

DRAFT - 11/6/57
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Rhode Island Ass'n.
for Mental Health

I am always happy when the Congressional cycle permits me to be here at home in Rhode Island to address groups like your own--groups of generous and public-spirited citizens who have banded together to give their time and their labor and their money in the battle against illness and ignorance.

For the honor you have done me tonight, I am most deeply grateful. I have been fortunate in having been granted the opportunity to do my share in the national mental health movement. I am gratified that you have found my efforts worthy of notice. And I pledge myself to continued efforts on behalf of the goal of better health of all our people.

All over the Nation, mental health volunteer groups are recruiting new members at a rapid rate and discovering the countless ways in which their energy and their enthusiasm can be used. All these groups are united in a common and a noble purpose. I like to think, though--and I freely admit that this may be the result of nothing more than fierce local pride--that we in Rhode Island have a little extra something working for us. This something is a tradition of sympathy and understanding for those who are, for one reason or another, different from the rest of us.

Three centuries ago the plight of the mentally ill was tragic indeed. Those unfortunates had to cope not only with the intense inner stresses and torments which had unbalanced their reason in the first place, but also with the pillories, the shackles, the whips, the taunts, or, at best, the icy indifference of a populace which regarded mental illness either as a crime or as a form of demonic possession. In Great Britain, for instance,

it was not until 1736 that the laws against witchcraft were repealed; and it was not until the end of the eighteenth century that intermittent local persecutions of the mentally ill accused of witchcraft came to an end.

In contrast to these attitudes--prevailing in a day when banishment from their communities was the best the mentally disturbed could expect, and unutterable torture the worst--we can, if we look hard, find isolated instances of understanding and concern and sympathy. I am proud that some of the earliest of these instances took place in our State.

In 1650, at a time when most communities went to any lengths to avoid the responsibility of caring for their own, we find Roger Williams addressing a letter to the town council of Providence on behalf of a distracted woman, Mrs. Weston. In this letter he asks "that some publike act of mercy to her necessities stand upon record amongst the merciful acts of a merciful town that hath received many mercies from Heaven, and remembers that we know not how soon our own wives may be widows and our children orphans, yea, and ourselves be deprived of all or most of our reason before we goe from hence, except mercy from the God of Mercies prevent it."

This attitude, so rare in a time when the mentally ill were caged like wild beasts, lashed and incarcerated in dungeons and workhouses, and driven, unfed and unclothed, from town to town, is what leads me to say that Rhode Island has something a little special in its traditional tolerance and understanding.

Groups like this one have shown that they are capable of translating our State's humanitarian heritage into modern terms, to meet the needs and challenges of our day. As you all well know, there are needs and challenges a-plenty.

Permit me to review a few of them for you in brief statistical form. You know, speaking of statistics, to paraphrase the song from "My Fair Lady," "we've grown accustomed to their size." In a day when "ten billion dollars" rolls as effortlessly off the tongue as "ten thousand" used to, it is difficult to excite people with numbers. We are so used to enormous size in everything from the horsepower of our cars to the national budget that we are easily left unmoved by figures showing the incidence of some of our crippling and incapacitating illnesses. Try, if you can, to do some concrete visualizing as I go over the scope of the problems and the challenges confronting those of us who are interested in working for better mental health.

1. Over one million people are treated annually in the mental hospitals of the United States, in addition to substantial numbers treated in clinics and by private psychiatrists. Nobody really knows, though, how many mentally ill people there are in our Nation. Certainly the figure is much higher than that of patients who are treated.
2. There are probably 4,000,000 problem drinkers in the United States, about a million of whom are suffering from severe chronic alcoholism. This means, statistically, that of every 40 people you know, one is struggling with the problem of alcohol.
3. About 1,750,000 serious crimes are committed in this country every year. This means three serious crimes committed every minute, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year in the United States.
4. For every four marriages in the country this year, there will be one divorce.
5. One-quarter of a million children between the ages of 7 and 17 are brought to the Juvenile Courts of our Nation every year.

6. Of every hundred children born in the United States this year, three will suffer from some form of mental retardation.
7. The total direct annual cost of mental illness to the United States-- maintenance of public and Veterans Administration hospitals for the mentally ill, construction of new public hospital and clinic facilities, and public assistance to the mentally ill and retarded--is estimated at more than one billion dollars, to say nothing of the uncounted and uncountable billions in indirect costs and in human suffering.

This is the size of the problem with which you have chosen to grapple. You are courageous people indeed.

Broadly speaking, there are two kinds of activities being pursued in the fight against mental illness, or, for that matter, against any illness. One is research--discovering more about the nature of the illness, its causes, its course, its symptoms, and devising new and improved ways of caring for and treating those suffering from it. The other is bringing the concrete results of research to the people, through the efforts of trained professionals working in hospitals and clinics, for Federal, State, and local governments, for a great variety of private groups and institutions, and in private practice.

Both of these kinds of activities are difficult, expensive, and often apparently unrewarding. But they are both necessary, for in them lie the hopes for the elimination of the disease enemies which have plagued mankind for as long as he has existed on this earth.

Right now the Nation is almost frighteningly short of properly-trained specialists who can carry forward the research and treatment programs which we need so badly. In addition, insufficient operating and construction funds have made the average State mental hospital woefully overcrowded and understaffed, and have kept us from having nearly the number and kind of clinic facilities needed by the people of our country.

But all is not black. Though we haven't enough people and haven't enough money, we do have one thing. And this one is perhaps the most important of all. It is an attitude--an attitude of caring, of wanting to do better.

In spite of the still pressing needs of many of our public institutions for the mentally ill, we understand and acknowledge that every man is, to some degree, responsible for his fellow men, and we show this understanding by our enthusiastic approval of government action on every level, and our support of the many volunteer groups which have sprung up within the last four or five decades.

On the National level, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare is active in research, training, and rehabilitation, and has a program of assistance for the States that is richly supplemented by State funds.

The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, as an example, gives technical and financial assistance to State rehabilitation agencies.

The Children's Bureau of the Social Security Administration offers both technical and financial help to the States in their programs of care and rehabilitation of handicapped children.

In St. Elizabeths Hospital, the Federal Government is supporting one of the Nation's outstanding hospitals for the mentally ill.

Through the National Institute of Mental Health, National Institutes of Health, Public Health Service, the Federal Government is making its biggest and most varied contribution to better national mental health. In its Bethesda laboratories the Institute is conducting a broad program of basic and clinical research. The Institute is this year supporting research in universities, hospitals, clinics, other research institutions of various kinds, and communities all over the country to the extent of more than twelve million dollars.

Fourteen million dollars of Institute money is being used this year to support training activities--to supply the urgently needed personnel in a variety of mental health professions.

For technical assistance and grants to the States aimed at developing State mental health programs and facilities, the Institute is spending more than five million dollars this year.

This cooperative relationship between the Federal Government and State or private institutions is evident in some other recent developments in Rhode Island. The Emma Pendleton Bradley Home is expanding its services to include an out-patient service for disturbed children and adolescents, a most desirable addition to this institution's splendid program of treatment and research. The Federal Government is contributing in other ways to make this program a success. Through the Mental Health Projects Grants program, the National Institute of Mental Health is helping to support a special group program for disturbed children. In addition, the Research Grants and Fellowships Branch of the Institute is supporting some of the research being carried on at the Home. Through its training branch the Institute is supporting three traineeships and one teaching grant in psychiatry at Emma

Pendleton Bradley. This sort of cooperation exists in a number of other Rhode Island institutions--Brown University, for research, the University of Rhode Island, for training, and the Providence Child Guidance Clinic, for training.

Of course, the big news in Rhode Island this year is the reopening of the Butler Health Center. I hope that this event marks the beginning of a new era, bringing the advantages of expert treatment to all who need it, and supplying a focus for many community mental health activities. I applaud all those tireless workers responsible for the reopening of an institution which has become a Rhode Island tradition. It is interesting that Clifford Beers, the founder of the mental health movement in America, spent his last days at the Butler Hospital as the guest of Dr. Arthur H. Ruggles. I trust that Mr. Beers' close association with the Butler Hospital is symbolic of the pioneer role the new Health Center will play in community mental health activities.

Speaking of Mr. Beers, it was in 1933 that the late Dr. George A. Blumer, then superintendent emeritus of Butler Hospital wrote:

"... He (Beers) is in the Temple of Fame by inherent right of entry; and in that part of it dedicated to the daughter of Aesculapius his name will stand out in bold relief with those of Philippe Pinel, William Tuke and Dorothea Dix, to mention only three illustrious reformers who wrought with like zeal and effectiveness to save and succour the wretched in whose cause Clifford Beers went forth valiantly to battle twenty-five years ago."

We are fighting that same battle today. I have great faith that the ultimate victory will be ours. When groups like yours can give of themselves the way they have, in a spirit of dedication to their communities, their

country, indeed to all humanity, then there can be no insuperable obstacles, no insoluble problems.

When the task seems too much, when we are faced with the inevitable discouragements and delays in achieving our goals, let us always think of the countless thousands with whom we are marching in common cause. Let them remind us that, though our needs are great, so is our strength.