

# Essondale Overcrowding, Facilities Criticized

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VICTORIA, April 16.—Many patients at Essondale mental hospital sit from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. behind locked doors, with nothing to do but stare at each other, Miss K. M. G. Lowdon of "The Vista," rehabilitation home in Vancouver's Kitsilano district for discharged Essondale patients, told Victoria Club for the Hard of Hearing.

They go to bed at 6 p.m. and stay there until 6 a.m., and that

is the 24-hour period of the patients, Miss Lowdon said, adding that because of help shortages supper is started at 3 p.m. and nothing more can be eaten until the next morning.

## FORMER PATIENT

Miss Lowdon said she spoke as a former patient at Essondale. She said the monotony so got on her nerves that one day she screamed aloud and was then put in a strait jacket and laced to a bed for three weeks.

That taught her, she said, to keep quiet.

## DOCTOR'S DIFFICULTIES

Miss Lowdon admitted the difficulty of the doctors, because there are only seven doctors to nearly 5000 patients, when the American Mental Hygiene association says there should be one doctor for every 150 patients.

Essondale is 64 per cent overcrowded, and segregation of various types of patients is entirely inadequate.

"Can you imagine yourself trying to sleep when you can reach out and touch the person in the bed next to you. You're herded into a room and the door is locked—there is always the rattle of keys, there is no freedom, you're herded around like cattle—the majority of the patients have nothing to do but sit and sit and sit and stare at each other."

## "UNPAID FOR WORK"

There are far too many patients doing staff work without a cent of pay. If they could be paid and the money built into a reserve it would give patients some hope for the day when they would be discharged.

Educational facilities are practically nil; there should be a school room where patients could study.

Music is an absolute necessity. There is a radio and a piano at present, but the majority quarrel over them. There should be an orchestra, as there is in advanced mental hospitals in the U.S., and the patients should have a newspaper of their own.

## "DIET IMPROVED"

One woman patient at Essondale has not seen a newspaper for 13 years. There should be recreational facilities for the staff, too, she said, so they could get away from their trying work and relax. The diet has been horribly inadequate, though it has changed a little for the better in recent weeks.

There are so many people in Essondale who shouldn't be there, Miss Lowdon said. The hospital is fast becoming an old people's home.

Essondale is no place for a psychiatric hospital, as is planned. Such an observation hospital should be far removed from a mental hospital.

It is bad for a person, in a psychiatric institution to be able to look out the window at the mental hospital and keep wondering "is that the next step?"

## "X" AN ABOMINATION

Vancouver General hospital is now renovating a new 24-bed ward to take the place of Ward "X" which she said has been an abomination, a dirty, dingy, cell-like basement ward, where the insane were taken to die.

"How the people of Vancouver for so long allowed such an abomination in their midst I do not understand."

The New Westminster mental hospital, instead of being renovated, should have been torn down and rebuilt.

"That place stench like a cattle barn."

There should be a woman doctor at Essondale. Chiropractors and osteopaths should be allowed to practice there.

## "ACCEPT THE CURED"

Miss Lowdon appealed to the public to accept persons cured of mental illness as they accept persons cured of physical illness. At present, persons discharged from a mental hospital have to hide the fact and lie about it in order to get employment.