THE TUBERCULOSIS PROBLEM IN NEW YORK CIVIL STATE HOSPITALS

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The Board of Visitors of the Rockland State Hospital has been studying for some time those of its patients who, in addition to their mental disease, are suffering from pulmonary tuberculosis.

Out of an average monthly census of about 3,500 patients we have found about fifty patients who were afflicted with tuberculosis. In order to learn the incidence of tuberculosis in patients not suspected of having the disease, roentgenologic lung studies were made of 56 females who were of a sedentary group and who took very little active interest in their environment. It was found that 16 per cent gave evidence of tuberculosis, either active or inactive. This figure is about four or five times higher than that found in the ordinary population.

The questions that naturally arose were, first, whether all the tuberculous patients were properly segregated in the interest of public health and, second, whether they were receiving the most modern and scientific therapy by experts in this field.

Considering it important to ascertain the status of this situation in other State hospitals, we sent a questionnaire through the office of the Commissioner to the superintendent of each State hospital, by which we sought to elicit the following facts as of the last fiscal year.

(1) The number of psychiatric cases.
(2) The number of cases of tuberculosis.
(3) The number of cases developing during the year.
(4) The number of sputum positive cases.
(5) The number of cases with unilateral cavitation.
(6) The number of cases with bilateral cavitation.
(7) The number of deaths from tuberculosis.
(8) The type of facilities in each hospital for the modern care of tuberculosis.
(9) The special training of each physician and attendant in view of the fact that the treatment of tuberculosis with the most modern methods has become so highly specialized.
Tuberculosis patients should have fresh air, hygienic surroundings, and proper nursing, food and medication. Specialization includes not only observation with roentgenologic check-up and laboratory data, but, in addition, the use of various methods for collapse therapy. The purpose of this therapy is either to splint a lung in order to limit its excursions and prevent spread of infection, or to collapse cavities by artificial pneumothorax or by various minor or major surgical procedures such as thoracoplasty, phrenic nerve operations and pneumonolysis. The ultimate goal is to render the patient's sputum negative. This not only improves or cures the patient but it solves the public health problem because the patient is no longer a carrier.

There can be no question that the cure of a disease like tuberculosis should have a very beneficial effect on a patient's mental condition.

Statistics

The accompanying statistical tables present the information which we were able to obtain through our questionnaire. It must not be assumed that the data which has been compiled is completely accurate. Cases of tuberculosis might easily be overlooked in a psychiatric hospital. Some patients who might be considered non-tuberculous by a resident psychiatrist, would be pronounced tuberculous by a qualified expert. In addition, psychotic patients are often uncooperative and they frequently hide or distort symptoms.

After an analysis of the statistics our board, which has been impressed with the importance of the entire problem, presents it for your consideration.

Out of a total of about 68,000 patients, approximately 1,600, or 2 per cent, are diagnosed as tuberculous. It must be noted that there are many cases in whom the examinations of the sputum and cavitation are unreported. We know that patients with cavities are carriers and that usually sputum-positive cases have cavities. The statistics show a discrepancy in that the preponderance of sputum-positive cases over cavitation is too great. The number of sputum-positive cases as compared with the total is too low. The average should be about 50 per cent after examination with routine laboratory methods. All these facts indicate insufficient attention to the laboratory and roentgenologic study of tuberculous patients in our State hospitals.