

THE MENTAL OUT-PATIENT CLINIC—WHOM DOES IT HELP ?

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On the shores of one of the Great Lakes that serve as a boundary between the United States and Canada is a city of upward of seventy-thousand inhabitants in a county of somewhat less than twice that number. Until recently there has been in it no physician with special knowledge of mental or nervous disorders. The nearest was too far away to be easily available to persons with little or no means to pay consultation fees. Yet many persons and social agencies felt the need of such advice as only a psychiatrist could give.

This need was felt more acutely following the close of the War, when the Home Service Section of the Red Cross had many cases of returned soldiers and their families to provide for. It became so pressing that in the summer of 1920, under the leadership of the local chairman of Civilian Relief of the Red Cross, a psychiatrist was induced to come to the city and give his services once a week to the Red Cross.

The value of this consultation service to the Red Cross was soon demonstrated, and other agencies wanted to share its benefits. The establishment of a free mental clinic was at first opposed by local physicians, who feared a loss of practice. But it was easy to show that poor patients would not contribute to their income in any event, and satisfactory plans were readily formed to meet the objection in the case of patients able to pay. In the end the County Medical Society itself became a sponsor and supporter of the new mental clinic, and appointed a committee of its members to give their services to it.

The State Department of Health gave the free use of the local State dispensary, and a psychiatric social worker who had recently come to the city contributed part of her time. The Red Cross contributed clerical work and such services as were necessary to look up family histories of patients and other data.

The clinic thus organized was opened in December 1920, and has been open once a week to residents of the county since then. To the first of September of this year an even hundred patients have been seen.