PSYCHOSOCIAL PROBLEMS OF LONG STAY MENTAL PATIENTS

S. P. GUPTA1, M.S.W., LL.B., Ph.D., D.R.M.
B. S. YADAV2, M.D.
R. C. BHARADWAJ3, B.Sc., O.T.D.
R. P. SHARMA4, M.A., D.P.S.W.

SUMMARY

One hundred and ten inpatients (80 males and 30 females) of Agra Mental Hospital with continuous stay of more than two years formed the study population. Majority of them were schizophrenics. Demographic data of these patients, their current social contacts inside and outside hospital, attitude of hospital staff and family members toward them, self care, sexual problems, future plans, social acceptability and their employability have been reported.

A large 'long stay' population is a universal problem of mental hospitals. For this group, mental health workers the world over often find themselves helpless. With passage of time chances of their discharge and acceptability back into the community go on receding. This is perhaps the most formidable barrier in their ultimate rehabilitation. The psycho-social problems of these 'long stay' patients despite their importance have received only scant attention so far, especially in this country.

Cross et al., (1957) concluded that "only very small proportions required constant vigilance and about two thirds required routine care only" Garrett et al., (1957; 1958) found that 45 percent required no medical treatment and 64 percent needed no skilled nursing care. Cooper and Early (1961) found that 47 percent patients were not in need of hospital facilities—most of them should be looked after in a "long stay annexe or after care hostel". Catterson et al. (1963) in a survey of the functional handicaps of a sample of long stay schizophrenics who had been in Netherne hospital for more than 2 years and were aged under 60 reported that thirteen percent of the patients were likely to be able to hold stable jobs after being discharged from the hospital.

Among the studies undertaken in our country, Gupta et al. (1968) concluded that 54% of the total hospital population required nothing but opportunities for social learning and rehabilitation programmes. Bhaskaran et al. (1972) studied 148 schizophrenic patients with a view to find out the relationship between length of stay and attitude to staying in the hospital, complaints about the shortcomings of hospital, degree of interest in the patients by their relatives, their clinical picture and attitude to work.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Sample for the present study was taken from the inpatient population of the Agra Mental Hospital. For the purpose of sampling a complete list of all inpatients was obtained indicating name, district of residence and date of admission of each patient. Thus a total of 676 (510 male and 166 female patients) were on the roll in the week ending on 31st October, 1978. All patients admitted prior to 31st Oct. 76 and continuously hospitalized for a period of 2
years or more were marked as 'long stay patients'. The length of their stay varied from 2 to 51 years. For the purpose of present investigation every third patient was selected out of the 240 male and 90 female patients. Thus the study sample consisted of 110 patients, 80 male and 30 female patients. Interviews of individual patients were carried out in different sections of the hospital. Information from the ward nurse, attendant and doctor was also obtained where the information from patient was either difficult to gather or the patient gave irrelevant or ambiguous replies. Case records were screened to collect demographic information, diagnosis, current mental condition and the treatment that the patient was receiving.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows that male patients have a much longer stay in mental hospital as compared to females. 56.3% male patients had a continuous stay of 10 or more years as compared to 36.7% females.

Agewise break-up shows 36.4% in 30—39 age group followed by 21.8% in 40—49, 20.9% in 50—59, 12.7% in 60 and above and only 8.2% in under 30 group.

Educational Level:

More males (82.5%) were literate as compared to females (53.3%) and 48.7% males and 30% females had education up to high school and above.

Marital Status:

Table 2 shows that single males (50%) and married females (63.3%) were in majority and widowed males (11.3%) and separated females (3.3%) outnumbered the patients of these groups in the opposite sex.

| Marital status | Male (N=80) | Female (N=30) | Total (N=110) |
|----------------|-------------|---------------|---------------|
| Single         | 40 (50.0)   | 8 (26.7)      | 48 (43.6)     |
| Married        | 30 (37.5)   | 19 (63.3)     | 49 (44.5)     |
| Widowed        | 9 (11.3)    | 2 (6.7)       | 11 (10.0)     |
| Separated      | 1 (1.3)     | 1 (3.3)       | 2 (1.8)       |

Figures in parentheses indicate percentage.

| Length of Stay | Below 30 | 30-39 | 40-49 | 50-59 | 60+ | Total |
|----------------|----------|-------|-------|-------|-----|-------|
| M              | F        | M     | F     | M     | F   | M     |
| 2—5 years      | 5 (28.7) | 13 (46.7) | 7 (21.4) | 4 (28.7) | 3 (46.7) | 1 (36.7) | 2 (21.4) | 0 (0) | 0 (0) | 23 (28.7) | 14 (46.7) |
| 5—10 years     | 2 (15.0) | 0 (6.7) | 6 (21.4) | 2 (15.0) | 3 (16.7) | 1 (36.7) | 1 (36.7) | 2 (15.0) | 0 (0) | 12 (15.0) | 5 (16.7) |
| 10—15 years    | 0 (21.3) | 0 (10.0) | 8 (28.1) | 2 (21.3) | 6 (36.7) | 1 (36.7) | 3 (36.7) | 0 (0) | 0 (0) | 17 (21.3) | 3 (10.0) |
| 15 years +     | 0 (35.0) | 2 (28.1) | 2 (28.1) | 0 (35.0) | 4 (28.1) | 2 (28.1) | 11 (36.7) | 3 (36.7) | 1 (28.1) | 28 (35.0) | 8 (28.1) |
| Total          | 7 (8.2)  | 12 (14.3) | 14 (16.3) | 10 (11.3) | 16 (18.6) | 6 (7.2) | 17 (19.3) | 7 (8.2) | 1 (1.2) | 50 (55.5) | 30 (33.3) |
**Occupation before Hospitalization:**

Majority of the male patients (65%) were gainfully employed and majority of the female patients (86.7%) were housewives and only 10% male and 3.3% female patients were without any occupation before hospitalization.

**Class (Paying/Non-Paying):**

 Majority of the patients i.e. 79.1% of the sample were in general (free) class while remaining 20.9% were in paying classes of different categories (special, first, second and third). 70 (63.6%) patients were admitted by police or transferred from jails while only one patient (0.9%) was a voluntary boarder.

**Diagnosis:**

Most of the patients (92.7%) were chronic schizophrenics of hebephrenic, paranoid and simple variety and remaining 7.3% were mentally defectives, epileptics and others.

**TABLE 3—Current Mental Condition**

| Current mental condition | Duration of stay | Total |
|--------------------------|------------------|-------|
|                          | 2-5 yrs. | 5-10 yrs. | 10-15 yrs. | 15 yrs. |       |
| Improved                 | 17      | 7          | 5          | 6        | 35 (31.8) |
| Stationary               | 13      | 5          | 6          | 15       | 39 (33.5) |
| Worsened                 | 7       | 5          | 9          | 15       | 36 (32.7) |
| Total                    | 37      | 17         | 20         | 36       | 110     |

As shown in Table 3 current mental condition of these patients when compared to their condition at the time of their admission in the hospital, revealed that 35 patients (31.8%) had shown considerable improvement, 36 patients (32.7%) had deteriorated and condition of remaining 39 patients (35.5%) was more or less stationary.

**Current treatment:**

Majority of these patients (72.7%) were receiving psychotropic drugs. 12.7% were receiving both drugs and intermittent E.C.T. while remaining 14.6% were not getting any chemotherapy.

**Current social contacts:**

A large number of patients in the present series, i.e. 43.6% reported that they enjoyed their stay in the hospital, 36.4% however said that they were not liking their stay and the remaining 20% were either indifferent or did not respond to this question.

40% patients were mixing with their fellow patients in the ward, 53.6% were not mixing and of the remaining 6.4% cases the investigators were uncertain about their sociability.

When asked about the attitude of staff towards them 58 patients (52.7%) replied that hospital staff were cooperative, 12 (10.9%) patients were of the opinion that staff was not cooperative and 11 (10%) patients complained of being harassed by the attending staff (some of these patients were however paranoid schizophrenics). 15 (13.6%) patients replied that the staff was neither cooperative nor uncooperative but was indifferent towards them. Remaining 25 patients (22.7%) expressed no opinion or did not answer this question.

58 (52.7%) patients expressed their satisfaction for the food that they were getting while 27 (24.5%) were totally dissatisfied with the food and remaining 25 (22.7%) gave no response to this question.

**Occupation and Pastime activities:**

The problem of passing time in fact was not a problem to 52 (47.3%) patients who had already been accustomed to idle sitting or aimless wandering. 23 (20.9%) patients were found to be actively assisting in the general management and routine activities of their sections. 10 (9.0%) were
visiting library, reading newspapers and participating in indoor games. 12 (10.9%) were regularly going to hospital farm and hence spending most of their day time in farming. Another 12 (10.9%) were assisting in the kitchen while one patient was seen spending nearly whole of his time in writing irrelevant letters and articles inside his room.

Social contacts outside hospital:

77 (70%) patients in the present series had one or more living members in their families. Remaining 30% patients either had no living member in their families or they had no information about their present relatives. Out of 77 patients with families, only 2 (2.6%) patients were regularly visited by the relatives, 15 (19.5%) were occasionally visited, 18 (23.4%) were rarely visited while more than half (54.5%) have had no meeting with their family members during the past two years.

56 (72.7%) patients were not receiving letters from their family members. Only one patient (1.3%) was receiving more than one letter a month. 7 (9.1%) patients were getting at least one letter a month and remaining 13 (17.0%) patients were however receiving one letter in 3-6 months.

When asked about the attitude of their family members towards them 28 (36.4%) replied that their family members had sympathy for them. 21 (27.2%) said they were unsympathetic, 15 (19.4%) were of the view that their family members were indifferent. Remaining 13 (17.0%) either expressed no opinion or gave no response to this question.

Self Care:

Surprisingly, 70% patients in the present series of long stay chronic patients were reported to be looking after their personal hygiene properly. 24.5% were not particular about their self care and they required regular coaxing for it. In remaining 5.5% cases sufficient information was not available.

Sexual Problems and Practices:

Masturbation and homosexual activities were frequently reported in both male and female patients. 5 male and 4 female patients reported total loss of sexual urge in them. 6 male patients said they were much disturbed for not having normal heterosexual relations inside the hospital. One male patient had a sexual delusion that he had been doing sexual intercourse in the air with anyone willing, a man or a woman.

Future Plans:

47 (42.7%) patients in the present series were feeling fit to leave the hospital and among them 34 (30.9%) had formulated hopeful plans after discharge. 24 (21.8%) patients thought that they would be able to support themselves while 61 (55.5%) were diffident. 25 (22.7%) were either uncertain or did not respond.

A further question was addressed to 61 patients who clearly stated that they would have to be supported. 15 (24.6%) replied in affirmative, 26 (42.6%) replied in negative while remaining 20 (32.8%) were uncertain.

Social Acceptability:

A substantial number of patients, i.e. 54 (49.1%) were quite uncertain about their social acceptability after leaving the hospital. 34 (30.9%) however were hopeful. 20 (20%) patients thought they were doomed.

Employment Potential:

On the basis of a detailed interview with each patient and additional information supplied by the attending staff, an objective assessment of each patient's potential was made, keeping in view his/her age. 13 (11.8%) cases were found to have a potential to undertake independent jobs. 28 (25.6%) should require sheltered con-
ditions while majority of the patients, i.e. 69 (62.7%) were rated as unemployable.

COMMENTS

Results of the present study are in conformity with earlier reports (Gupta, et al., 1968; Bhaskaran et al., 1972). Majority were schizophrenics, exhibited disinterest in occupational, recreational activities, asocial behaviour and were accustomed to idle sitting. Despite having chronic illness a sizeable number of patients were hopeful of their acceptance in society and could work independently or under sheltered conditions.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors are thankful to the members of the Research Group, Mental Hospital, Agra who approved the subject of present investigation. They are also grateful to all the medical officers, staff nurses, head attendants and attendants of the mental hospital who helped in compiling the patient list of their respective sections and provided valuable assistance during the data collection phase. The 110 patients included in the study also deserve thanks for their cooperation.

REFERENCES

Bhaskaran, K., Dhawan, N. & Mohan Y. (1972). A study of the effects of prolonged hospitalization on schizophrenics, Indian J. Psychiat., 14, 106.

Catterson, A. G., Bennett, D. H. & Freudenberg, R. K. (1963). A survey of long stay schizophrenic patients. Brit. J. Psychiat., 109, 250.

Cooper, A. B. & Early, D. F. (1961). Evolution in the mental hospital. Brit. Med. J., I, 1600.

Cross, K. W., Harrington, J. A. & Mayer Gross, W. (1957). A survey of chronic patients in a Mental Hospital, Brit. J. Psychiat., 130, 146.

Garratt, F. N., Lowe, C. R. & McKeown, T. (1957). Investigation of the medical and social needs of patients in mental hospitals Part I, Brit. J. Prev. Soc., Med. II, 165.

Garratt, F. N., Lowe, C. R. & McKeown, T. (1958). Institutional care of the mentally ill Lancet, I, 682.

Gupta, P., Prabhu, M. & Prabhu C. C. (1968). Rehabilitation of the chronic psychiatric patients. Indian J. Psychiat., 10, 157.