

“The hope is well justified of returning to society individuals who seem to be hopeless. Our most assiduous and unflagging attention is required toward that numerous group of psychiatric patients who are convalescing or are lucid between episodes, a group that must be placed in the ward of the hospice and subject to a kind of psychological treatment.”

- Philippe Pinel, psychiatrist (1801) ¹²

The concept of therapeutic space for the mentally ill was first posited by Philippe Pinel and Jean-Etienne Esquirol, both influenced by humanist ideals of the Age of Enlightenment and the French Revolution.⁹ Needless to say, a few isolated asylums existed in the Middle Ages, but their sole goal was to protect

At the same time, the 1960s saw the birth of social protest movements: anarchism, feminism, gay rights, antiracism, and leftism. For the latter, psychiatrists represented an elite against which they quickly became alienated.^{14,15} For feminists, the male-dominated profession represented a patriarchal oppression.¹⁴ For gay rights

the agreement to take antipsychotic medication. The second part of the experiment involved a hospital administration asking Rosenhan to send fake patients. Over the next weeks, 41 out of 193 patients were declared to be suspicious by the staff. In fact, Rosenhan had sent no one.¹³ The paper he subsequently published in *Science* the same year would underline the subjective factors in psychiatric diagnosis. In it, he recommends favoring community mental health centers which focus on specific problems in behavior rather than psychiatric hospitals where pejorative labeling is rampant.¹³

Reinforcing negative public opinion

However, no antipsychiatry critique was as effective in swaying public opinion against psychiatric institutions as Ken Kesey's 1962 novel. *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* was adapted into a film in 1975, reaching an even bigger audience (it won five Oscars)¹ The main character, Randle McMurphy, fakes insanity and is admitted to a psychiatric facility: he thinks it will be an easy way out of his prison sentence. The head nurse at the facility is a tyrannical woman who coerces, humiliates and threatens the inmates, and Randle quickly antagonizes her. She finally has him lobotomized as a way to get revenge, leaving him mute and immobile. The book effectively portrays psychiatric hospitals as worse than prisons: controlling and ill-intentioned medical personnel mistreat patients, threatening and punishing them with procedures akin to torture.¹ Moreover, the novel reinforced Foucault's argument in the eyes of the public: asylums are a way for society to cast away troublesome people like Randle McMurphy.¹⁵

The novel's descriptions of psychiatric wards were not too far from reality. Erving Goffman, a Canadian-born sociologist, also underlined the similarities between psychiatric hospitals and prisons, denouncing the exile of patients from society.⁶ He even considered the psychiatric hospital itself as pathogenic due to the horrible conditions in which patients lived.⁶ According to him, there are no psychiatric illnesses justifying confinement.¹⁵ The inadequate conditions of mental health hospitals had already been reported as early as 1948 by journalist Albert Deutsch in his book *The Shame of the States*, after he traveled through the United States to visit facilities. His conclusion was the same everywhere: understaffed, overcrowded, often bug-ridden.¹⁵ More than a decade later, things had not improved much.

However, public outrage was mostly provoked by the use of electroshock therapy and lobotomy in psychiatric wards, not their dampness or bed bug infestations. In response to agitation raised by patients' rights groups, state legislatures began imposing new regulations on ECT (Utah was the first in 1967).¹⁵ The most prominent of those lobbying groups was called 1(t)8(h)-3 impe51(t)8(h)-3

Kennedy made public the story of his sister's failed lobotomy, also strengthening the American public's aversion to psychosurgery and their distrust of psychiatry in general. Rosemary Kennedy had the operation done in 1941 for behavioral problems: she was rendered incontinent and unable to walk or speak. She was only 23, but she had to be institutionalized all her life.¹⁰

Deinstitutionalization

Undoubtedly, Rosemary Kennedy's tragic story influenced her brother to put into place a new mental health care policy in 1963. The Community Mental Health Act allocated more federal funds to the construction and management of community health care centers. The social philosophy behind this new policy called attention to better access to services and more autonomy. In a community setting,

Lasting effects

“There are worse alternatives. One is

from large state-funded inpatient psychiatric hospitals to smaller-scale community mental health care centers, which preserved patients' right to self-determination.

The question is to be asked: what now?

First of all, the problem of social stigma must be addressed: it is inherent in the structure of laws, social services, judicial system and the way resources are distributed to different institutions.¹⁶ More concretely, strategies to change negative perceptions must target the media's inaccurate representations of mental illness and health care providers. Education must be involved in order to promote a perception of mental health that is based on facts rather than sensationalism. Moreover, stigma is lessened by contact with persons affected by mental illness but who are also able to lead enriching and productive lives:

