

Mental Hospital to Serve 200 Islanders a Year

By S. S. MESHEHY

Nearly 1,000 Islanders—one out of every 200 persons in the borough—are now patients of mental hospitals in this state, according to Dr. Paul H. Hoch, commissioner of the State Department of Mental Hygiene.

Today the borough president Hoch stated that Islanders must now travel long distances to visit members of their families in state mental hospitals.

"THE IMPORTANCE of emotional and mental illness has been emphasized in recent years," wrote the commissioner. "We know that one out of every ten persons will, at some time in their life, require mental hospitalization, and one out of every four families will be affected.

In addition more than 200 Islanders are being admitted each year to state-operated mental hospitals and the population of Islanders in such hospitals might exceed 2,000 in the next ten years, Commissioner Hoch has advised Borough President Maniscalco.

The Department of Mental Hygiene is considering development of a 3,000-bed mental hospital on the Island, probably in the South Beach—Midland Beach area, and the borough president last week asked the department for a report as to why Islanders should be interested in such a project.

"The total number of persons in the community suffering from illnesses with emotional components is difficult to estimate but the facilities for the treatment of persons with mental handicaps are totally inadequate.

"There are presently within the state hospitals for the mentally ill within the Department of Mental Hygiene of New York State nearly 1,000 persons who reside in the Borough of Hoch in addition to their admission over 200 persons every year to our state hospitals from your borough.

"If we project the foregoing figures we can conclude that in the next ten years there will be over 2,000 admissions from the Borough of Richmond to the State Hospital of Richmond to the Borough of Staten Island.

"The number of persons and their families on Staten Island concerned with mental hospitalization," he went on, "must now travel distances up to 90 miles round-trip to visit their relatives in existing state hospitals.

"Visitation is very important therapeutically. It is important not only to the members of the family who wish to visit their loved ones, but the patient derives material benefit. Under present circumstances these visits are somewhat expensive to the families involved."

Commissioner Hoch said that with the exception of the Borough of Richmond, each borough in the city will shortly have a mental hospital, that Manhattan, Brooklyn and Queens have such hospitals now and that one is now under planning for Bronx.

"I AM SURE that the residents of Staten Island are entitled to a similar facility," he continued, "and I also feel that if this is not planned at this time there is no assurance that it will be come available later, when the residents of your borough will most assuredly recognize that they are lacking in an important health facility.

"A mental hospital is important not only from the standpoint of providing in-hospital facilities, but it also serves as a resource for the broader mental health needs of the public.

"The trend in the mental health field is in the direction of community interest as demonstrated by the establishment of the Community Mental Health Services Board in the City of New York, which has stimulated and will continue to stimulate the establishment of mental health services on the community level.

"A hospital staff is a very important resource from this standpoint and should not be overlooked as a definite asset in your community."

"THE STATE official told the borough president that a number of Islanders would find permanent employment in a state-operated facility of this kind if it is established here. He said he was sure that the Willowbrook State School has made a contribution to the economy of the Island and that the same could be expected from the proposed mental hospital.

"You may be interested to know," he went on, "that we are considering the establishment of a 3,000-bed hospital which would have facilities for expansion to 4,000 beds if that should become necessary in the future.

"The hospital would be designed attractively and only four stories. It would be appropriately landscaped and I feel sure that with modern designing you will find it will be an attractive addition.

"I believe you will find that the medical profession and those citizens interested in mental health would welcome this addition to the array of facilities you have presently for the benefit of your citizens."

Borough President Maniscalco, who has taken no position on the proposed facility, yet, last week told state officials that among the requirements he would insist on before even agreeing to consider the project, is that the buildings be limited to four to four stories in height with the possible exception of a center building having an additional story or two. Commissioner Hoch's letter indicates that the state has now agreed to this.

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