

Glimpse of inn life: Lice and malnutrition

A few days before Thanksgiving 1978, a woman who lives at the former Christmas Tree Inn in Princes Bay was admitted to Richmond Memorial Hospital. Diagnosis: Severe infestation of lice and scabies.

Last Friday, after a nurse from the city Health Department visited the 51 Wilber St. boarding house, another resident of the inn, an elderly man, was admitted to the same hospital. Diagnosis: Malnutrition and dehydration.

The two cases are part of what city and state officials have conceded is a dangerous situation at a 27-room boarding house on Staten Island's South Shore. City Health Department nurses

visited the site two weeks ago after receiving a telegram from Assemblywoman Elizabeth A. Connelly, who said conditions of the inn were "life-threatening."

The nurses had one woman admitted to Richmond Memorial and made arrangements for two others to visit the hospital's outpatient clinic. In a memo to the city Health Department's first deputy commissioner, the supervising nurse for Staten Island, Eldred Graham, said: "Others, though ambulatory, seem to need care."

According to a nurse at Richmond Memorial, the Thanksgiving incident saw a thin elderly woman admitted to the hospital "covered from head to toe with lice and scabies." Both are usually associated with unhygienic conditions.

The woman was placed in a second-floor room and deinfested. After doctors finished with the woman, she had to be moved to another room, and the room she was in also had to be deinfested. The woman's clothes were destroyed, and because she had no other clothes, the hospital had to solicit donations from staffers to get clothing for her.

When the woman was released from the hospital, she went back to the Christmas Tree Inn.

In the second incident, a 55-year-old man, who had lived for many years in a state psychiatric center, was admitted to Richmond Memorial from the boarding house with a case of dehydration and malnourishment. He, too, had to be treated for lice infestation.

The man responded to treatment, but the hospital would not send him back. Instead, placement was made in Sts. Cosmas and Damien Adult home in Mariners Harbor, where the man is responding to treatment.

Hospital officials confirmed both incidents.

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