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Patients' future bleak?

Nurse says patients are not ready for community

A FORMER qualified nurse at Royal Derwent Hospital said this week she was terrified at the thought of patients being sent out to live in the community.

The nurse, who herself was seriously injured at work after being punched at Willow Court, said the public had no idea of what was being unleashed with the plan

to shift as many patients as quickly as possible into the community.

She asked not to be named for fear of reprisal from the hospital.

She said patients who were capable of being put into the community had left the hospital years ago. The ones remaining needed specialised supervision from trained nurses.

She said she had worked as a community nurse, calling weekly on patients already put into group houses.

She said they were unable to care for themselves properly, and at times she had hung out of windows retching at the appalling filth and stench.

"You can't blame the

patients, they don't know any better, they need constant supervision," she said.

She said while they had meals on wheels Monday to Friday, they had to cope the best way they could at weekends. Some simply did not eat. "They just sit around smoking," she said.

"I could not believe the

Government could do this to people."

One female patient who was now in the community just stayed in bed all day because there was nobody to supervise her. On one occasion the patient had taken two week's supply of medication at once after being given it by a carer who knew no better.

The patient's parents had asked for her to be re-admitted to the hospital so that she would be better cared for, but the hospital refused.

She said it had to be realised that patients had less than the mentality of a child, locked into a mature body.

All had the potential for violence, and like a child in a tantrum could lash out at anybody.

The nurse said scores of nurses had been assaulted within the hospital, and some had been permanently injured.

She said staff morale had dropped in the last six years as cost-cutting had left wards acutely short of qualified nurses.

The nurse said Tasmania was pursuing a trend tried overseas and in New South Wales, and

found to be wanting. Those same areas were now re-admitting former patients back to hospitals. Others share her views.

In New South Wales, half the homeless were former patients.

She said patients had as many physical problems as mental problems, and unless they could be given round-the-clock supervision by qualified nursing staff in group homes in the community, the plan to empty Royal Derwent and Willow Court was doomed.

"Patients are human beings and they deserve proper care," she said.

While the administration patted itself on the back for getting patients out of the hospital, it never went to see how patients were living.

"I've told them what it's like, but they don't want to know," she said.

Some patients ended up starving, and filthy. Some stole without realising they were stealing.

"I would like to know who will be accountable for patients who overdose, starve, die through constipation,

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Girl apprentices a first at Boyer

REBECCA BEAN (left) and Naomi Dowling made history at ANM Ltd, Boyer, when they won apprenticeships with the company after leaving school last year.

This month the two girls joined other apprentices for their basic training after being kitted out with overalls and boots, and will go down in the company's history books as its first female apprentices.

Rebecca will train as an electrician, while Naomi will train as a fitter and turner.

"They'll be treated the same as all the other apprentices, there is no discrimination," said apprentice trainer Mr Les Allman.

The company's public relations officer, Mr Steve Balmforth, said both girls had done well



than held their own at the interviews for the

Rebecca said she aimed for a career as an

year at school.

"I really enjoyed it"

**NEW NORFOLK
NEWSAGENCY**

Concern mounts at patients being moved from hospital to community

THERE is mounting concern among nursing staff at the Royal Derwent Hospital-Willow Court complex, New Norfolk, that big numbers of patients from Willow Court are to be shifted prematurely into the community.

Senior staff said the indications were that transfers would start in February.

Nursing staff say they are concerned that patients will be shifted to various parts of the State without adequate professional nursing back-up care, and without being correctly deinstitutionalised.

Staff, who cannot be named because of regulations preventing them from communicating with the Press, said all the indications were that there was a broad plan for patients to be supervised in centres by carers, or social trainers, and not trained nurses.

Some staff regarded it as a "covert operation," planned for some time as a

cost-cutting move.

The key to the operation, it is claimed, is that Federal funding is available for a wide range of community based care schemes which can be used to cover the cost of care for Willow Court and Royal Derwent Hospital patients, once they are in a community situation.

Nurses suspect that courses for carers, introduced this year, recent CES advertisements offering cleaners and carers qualified in first aid, and other advertisements for co-ordinators for carers, are part of a scheme to replace trained nurses when it comes to caring for patients in the community.

Nurses say there have been moves to get houses allocated by the Housing Division to community and voluntary groups, and these will be used for patients. Sources said three houses had been allocated to the City Mission.

A planning report for intellectually disabled services in Tasmania, prepared last August, and which looks at returning patients to their home areas shows 80 belong to the Greater Hobart area, 42 in Clarence and eastern district, 24 in Kingborough and southern district, nine in the northern region, 62 in the central north district, 27 in Mersey-Lyell region, 25 in Burnie district, six in Smithton district, and six in the West Coast district.

Nurses say they have no argument about plans to demolish Willow Court's ancient wards, but they have grave reservations about the plan to shift some 200 or more patients into accommodation within the community without adequate professional nursing care, and a correct deinstitutional process being followed.

They say some of the patients should not be allowed out of Willow Court

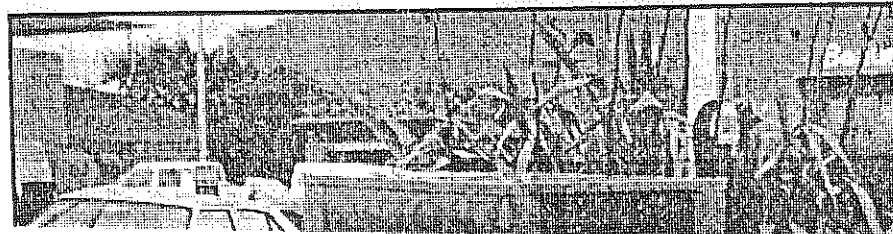
because of their behavioural problems, and to put them into the community without professional nursing supervision is courting disaster - for the patients, and the community.

"Apart from behavioural problems, some could asphyxiate just by getting on food if they were not watched...others could die from constipation...medication needs careful, professional supervision," a senior nurse said.

The plan to shunt patients into the community without adequate professional multi-skilled nursing and medical back-up, was a short term method of "getting rid of the problem of Willow Court, on the cheap," nurses said.

They say in the long-term it will be costly. It is claimed that some former Willow Court patients who were moved out into the community had to be admitted to the Royal Hobart Hospital because their physical condition had deteriorated.

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