

COSTS OF A SOCIAL SERVICE DEPARTMENT  
OF A STATE HOSPITAL VS. ECONOMIES  
EFFECTED THEREBY.\*

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The Kings Park State Hospital has over 5300 patients. Its annual admission rate usually varies between 1000 and 1200, most of the patients coming from Brooklyn. It maintains a social service department which, I believe, is both relatively and absolutely the largest for any institution of its kind in this country and probably elsewhere. It is, as I shall show, a rather expensive department to maintain. But I shall also show that through its operation a saving has been effected greatly exceeding the costs involved.

The view is not advanced here that the economic criterion is to be accepted, to the exclusion of others, in the evaluation of the work of any department of a state hospital. *To re-establish patients in an approximately normal extra-mural existence* is the end toward which the work of every department is directed. Any department which can be shown to be contributing materially toward that end may be said to justify its existence regardless of its costs, if the latter but remain within reasonable limits.

Nevertheless, it need hardly be urged that the economic point of view is not to be ignored. All else being equal, the least expensive way of accomplishing our purposes will be the preferred way.

When it can be shown that a given department not only contributes materially toward re-establishing patients in an approximately normal extra-mural existence but also secures a saving in costs, it is thereby also shown that the hospital could not afford, either from a professional or an economic point of view, to conduct its operations without such a department.

The value of the work of a social service department from a professional point of view will not be discussed here, as it has been

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dealt with elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> The object of this communication is to furnish a statement of this hospital's experience with regard to the costs of maintaining such a department and the economies effected thereby.

The Kings Park State Hospital was the first institution of its kind to employ a field worker. This was in 1910; and the first purpose was to supplement family histories obtained from patients' visitors at the hospital with data to be secured through field investigation. In the course of time the functions of the field worker became more and more those of social investigation and social service.

During the past two years a special effort was made to increase the number of patients on parole, and this necessitated the organization of a large social service department. At the time of this writing (March, 1922) that department employs the following personnel: one senior assistant physician, six female social workers, one male attendant detailed as a social worker, two stenographers, and one transportation agent.

Our present purpose will be best served by making a comparison of pertinent costs and savings for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1919, with those for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1921. The figures for the comparison are given in the following table:

	Fiscal year ending June 30,	
	1919	1921
Salaries and wages. ....	\$900.00	\$5,646.64
Maintenance of personnel. ....	360.00	1,824.00
Traveling expenses. ....	429.55	1,787.75
Transportation of patients. ....	2,806.83	5,152.53
Totals. ....	\$4,496.38	\$14,410.92

<sup>1</sup> Mary C. Jarrett. *Applications of Sociology in Psychiatry*. In Manual of Psychiatry, by A. J. Rosanoff, fifth edition, New York, 1920. A. J. Rosanoff and T. S. Cusack. *Parole System and Its Relation to Occupational Therapy*. Amer. Journ. of Insanity, Oct., 1920. W. C. Garvin. *How the Number of Parole Patients were Increased at the Kings Park State Hospital*. N. Y. State Hospital Quarterly, Nov., 1920. A. J. Rosanoff. *The Work of a Social Service Department of a State Hospital*. The Modern Hospital, April, 1922.

Part of the increase in the items of salaries, wages, and maintenance of personnel, shown in the above table, is due not to taking on additional officers or employees, but to re-assignments in the hospital. Also part of the increase in the item of transportation of patients is due not to added transportation of paroled patients to and from the hospital, but to an increase by nearly one hundred in the admissions of the last fiscal year. As it would be difficult, if not impossible, to isolate increases of expenditures attributable to new social service activities from increases in the above items attributable to expansion of other work of the hospital, I have charged all increases to the cost of the social service department.

Turning now to the economies effected, these were mainly in the form of savings of maintenance of patients released on parole. The daily average number of patients on parole during the fiscal year ending June 30, 1919, was 304; during that ending June 30, 1921, it was 669—an increase of 365.

The per capita cost of maintenance of patients at the hospital during the fiscal year ending June 30, 1921, was \$379.53. Multiplying this by the number representing the increase of the daily average number of patients on parole, we obtain the product of \$138,528.45. Subtracting from this the sum of \$9,914.54, representing the increased costs of the social service department, as shown in the table, we find the net saving, accomplished with the aid of that department during the year in question, to be \$128,613.91.

This does not represent the limit of possible achievement of such a department. Further noteworthy progress has been made since the close of the last fiscal year in spite of the prevailing hard times and unemployment, but this cannot readily be shown until the figures for the current fiscal year, which is to end June 30, 1922, become available. What can be done under more favorable condition, *i. e.*, in times of industrial prosperity and when the organization and technic of the social department have become perfected from experience, remains for the future to show.