

If possible, in our opinion, all new wards or buildings adjacent thereto should be constructed of fire-resisting material and also be spaced to provide adequate fire-breaks to prevent as far as possible spread of fire.

Where it is necessary to lock patients in rooms by doors and window shutters it should be possible to install in each room an emergency exit opening from the outside.

The existing fire escapes should be carefully examined and approved by the Public Works Department or other competent authorities. We suggest that the Superintendent of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade nearest to each institution be asked to assist in such examination.

We are of the very definite opinion that no manual system of fire-alarm control is or can be adequate and that modern automatic alarm-recording system (electrically controlled), preferably automatic sprinkler system, should be installed throughout Seacliff and similar institutions. So far as practicable fire-alarm-recording equipment and brigade appliances should be housed in one building.

We have considered whether any further practicable steps could be taken at Seacliff Mental Hospital to reduce fire hazard. We are of the opinion—

- (a) The length of hose available is inadequate and should be increased:
- (b) The nozzles should be replaced with modern nozzles of all diameters:
- (c) All branch pipes should be reconditioned owing to their inner condition having deteriorated, due possibly to lack of expert knowledge in maintenance:
- (d) The present water-supply is insufficient to combat a major fire. The available maximum number of gallons per minute and pressure obtained during tests should be increased. Six hundred gallons per minute is the maximum output at what is generally regarded as a low pressure. Reserves of water at 600 gallons per minute would last about four hours (allowing for inflow during that period). Provision should be made for increased flow by increased reservoir capacity and by a thorough overhaul of the reticulation system. We appreciate that owing to the existing nature of the hillside it is extremely difficult to install reservoirs capable of conserving adequate supplies of water.

We have not had the opportunity of inspecting any hospital other than Seacliff, and the following remarks, though of general application to all mental hospitals, apply particularly to Seacliff Mental Hospital in view of its isolated position and the nature of buildings:—

- (a) That a suitable employee attached to the maintenance staff (not a nursing attendant) should be appointed in charge of the fire brigade at the institution. His duty being to control the brigade, organize and supervise all duties, including instruction to female staff in operation of hose, reels, bucket pumps, extinguishers, and to be responsible for the maintenance of all equipment and appliances. He should be attached for fourteen days each year to the nearest city fire brigade to undergo training and receive experience in modern fire-fighting:
- (b) That a sufficient number of the male staff should be available at all times to man at least two deliveries and to turn out in not more than two minutes from time of alarm as a first crew:
- (c) That a trailer pump capable of boosting at high pressure water from water-main or water from static supplies should be provided. Also that brigade be equipped with modern rescue equipment in the form of gas-masks and self-contained oxygen-breathing sets.

The above recommendations (a), (b), and (c) are made on the advice of Mr. Laidlaw, whose experience in the matter the other members of the Commission must rely on.

We make the following general observations regarding matters which have come to our notice during the course of our inquiries:—

We think we would fail in our duties if we omitted some reference to the state of the buildings. In our opinion some are unsuitable according to modern ideas. Ward D, in particular, should be pulled down or remodelled. The main building was erected in 1883 and, owing to the creeping nature of the soil, maintenance of same has always been costly, difficult, and unsatisfactory. A Commission held a lengthy sittings in 1888, and the evidence given before it shows that the question of possibility of evacuation was even at that time considered. Since then the main building has been repaired as urgently required and fresh buildings—the later ones of modern design—have been added as the necessity for extra accommodation arose. No doubt the extremely heavy cost of transferring the institution to another and more suitable site has each time the matter was considered been looked upon as an insuperable obstacle.

The present buildings as a whole are unsuitable for the staff to carry out its duties in the best interests of the patients. The Medical Superintendent, Medical Officers, Matron, and all members of the staff labour under great disadvantages and will continue to do so until the institution is remodelled. It is difficult to see how this can be carried out on the present site. We do not think there should be any extension of the present buildings until the whole question is fully investigated by experts and a final decision made by the proper authorities.