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Asylum rules – Cardiff 1919

At the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century many patients with chronic mental illnesses were detained in large asylums. The earlier hopes that care, kindness, good food and education would restore them to health had failed. The asylums had become a way to cope with a group of people whose illnesses caused concern to others. In this online archive I give two sets of rules which give some idea of attitudes towards staff and patients detained in psychiatric hospitals in the early 20th century.

The Cardiff rules show a different relationship between the upper and lower members of staff than is the case today. I include some examples from the *Regulation and Instruction* book.

1. 'Every male nurse or servant coming into contact with or passing the Committee of Visitors or Medical Superintendent, the Medical Officers, or the Chaplain shall give a military salute. The nurses are required to stand up if seated.
2. They must always bear in mind that the insane are not responsible for their words or actions, and must therefore on no occasion resent either intemperate language or unruly behaviour but exhibit uniform kindness, forbearance and sympathy.
3. The patients in general shall not leave their day room to go to bed until between 7.30 pm and 7.45 pm.
4. When a patient escapes through inattention or carelessness the nurse in charge will pay a fine.
5. No nurse shall be permitted to smoke during the hours of duty.
6. No nurse is allowed to bring newspapers on to the ward without the permission of the Superintendent.
7. All letters written by patients are to be delivered to the Medical Superintendent.
8. When a new patient is admitted he is to have a bath of a temperature of not less than 90 or more than 97 degrees as ascertained by a thermometer.
9. No patient can be visited for one month after his admission, unless by special permission of the Medical Superintendent.
10. Visitors are prohibited from receiving letters from patients for the post.

11. No patient is to be left alone with a visitor, except by special permission of the Medical Superintendent.
12. When the weather is cold the patients (exercising) are to be induced to walk quickly, but when the weather is warm they may proceed more leisurely and rest on the garden seats.
13. Wherever exercising, the patients are not allowed to pick flowers.
14. When walking outside the hospital, the patients are not to be permitted, upon any pretext whatsoever to speak to, or to communicate with persons outside or passing.
15. At church they (the nurses) shall behave reverently, join audibly, as far as they are able, in the chanting and singing, encouraging the patients to do likewise.
16. In preparing a bath, the cold water is always to be turned on first.'

References

Regulation and Instruction Book of the City of Cardiff Mental Hospital, 1919.