

SOUTH PACIFIC COMMISSION

REPORT ON A VISIT TO WESTERN SAMOA

(9th to 11th January, 1972
and
18th to 26th January, 1972)

by
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I. Mental Health Unit

The Unit functions fairly well although it is still without a fence. The writer wishes to recommend that the destroyed glass panels be quickly replaced, if not by glass then by metal sheets or even by plywood sheets, suitably painted white, yellow, pink or light green (in any case, a bright colour). Restoration of the Unit to its former glory would appear especially desirable in view of the fact that out-patient sessions are held there twice weekly (Monday and Thursday) by both the Mental Health Officer and the Psychiatric Social Worker.

It would appear advisable that the extension to the Unit, for which funds have largely been made available through the generosity of Western Samoa's "Ambassador of Good Will", Mrs Aggie Grey, is soon proceeded with, preferably before Mrs Grey returns from her New Zealand sojourn since the donation was made as long ago as 20th April, 1971.

II. Clinical Case Conference

On Wednesday, 19th January, 1972, a case conference was held with fourteen medical officers present at Apia General Hospital. The cases presented were all schizophrenics: two catatonic, one simple, one paranoid. Differential diagnosis and management were discussed - as it was afterwards with those medical officers who had seen one of the cases before but who were not present at the case conference. This appeared particularly indicated in view of the preventive aspects of one case where some self-damage might have been prevented had the diagnosis been made in time and effective treatment instituted.

The writer wishes to attach no blame of any kind but feels this provided a good instance where to point out the often very concrete and practical issues of mental health care which tend to be overlooked sometimes because of the somewhat esoteric associations linked with psychiatry.

III. Psychiatric Evaluation of Offender

On the last day of the writer's visit a request was made by Mr Leo, a solicitor, later repeated by Mr Hayes, the Attorney General, that a prisoner be psychiatrically evaluated as regards his mental state. A capital charge had been preferred against him.

The case is not an easy one and many issues are involved. Expecially longitudinal data are missing, although some such data were obtained from his brother, also serving a prison sentence (his fourth).

The mental health officer will interview both the wife of the prisoner and his mother with specific questions which remain unanswered.

A preliminary report will be submitted. It is understood that the Mental Health Specialist may be called by the court as expert witness. February 28th, 1972, was mentioned as a possible date for the trial.

IV. Repatriation of Non-Samoan to Country of Origin

Considerable time was spent on the repatriation of a United States citizen who landed in Western Samoa and who suffered an exacerbation of an already existing psychosis.

The L.D.S. church (Elder Coombs) and the U.S. Peace Corps (Director, Mr Snyder) in Apia gave invaluable help.

A detailed report was issued.

V. Article for the South Pacific Bulletin

In the third issue of 1971 of the above journal, an article appeared on "Mental Health Care in Western Samoa". The article was written by Dr Simi Tafunai and the Mental Health Specialist. A follow-up article for the same journal was drawn up by the same authors, joined by the Psychiatric Social Worker, Mr E. Vickland. The purposes of this account are:

- (a) to evaluate eighteen months functioning of the Mental Health Unit;

- (b) to set forth future aspirations for improvements to the Western Samoa Community Mental Health Service;
- (c) to encourage other territories to likewise improve their mental health care, a field in which Western Samoa is leading.

VI. Acknowledgements

As on past occasions, the writer wishes to thank Dr J.C. Thieme, M.D., Director of Health for all the help given. Thanks are also due to the Prime Minister of Western Samoa, the Honourable Tupua Tamasese Lealofi IV for the generous hospitality received, and to my colleagues Dr S. Tafunai, Mental Health Officer, and Mr E. Vickland, Psychiatric Social Worker for their help and co-operation.

It is hoped that before the next visit, which should normally start approximately 16th April, 1972, details will be available as regards the three months training course for mental health medical officers scheduled to take place sometime in 1972.

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ANNEXJUDICIAL CONFERENCE

This started with a pre-conference meeting on Sunday, 9th January, 1972, when various procedural issues were discussed.

The writer took part in the formal opening held at the Lands and Title's Court in Upolu on 10th January, 1972.

To the writer the most interesting papers were read on 10th and 11th January by the past and present Chief Justices of Western Samoa on the relationship between functional indigenous law and super-imposed European law systems. This point is made here because of the implications for mental health care: if in a case of serious crime by an offender who was found as "of unsound mind" an indigenous law can lead to re-integration of the offender within the community and if, on the other hand, an effective community mental health service can prevent recurrence of the offence by making it safe for the community to have the offender living within it, then such a state of affairs obviously is a very desirable one, usually not enjoyed where European laws alone reign.

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