

# Hospital Where Chief Fired Has 1-1.5 Staff-Patient Ratio

By The Associated Press

Polk State Hospital, Pennsylvania's largest facility for the mentally retarded, has one staff member for every 1.5 patients, but the handling of residents has forced the firing of its superintendent.

Polk's staff numbers 1,819 and its patient load is 2,825, or nearly 60 per cent over its capacity, according to the Welfare Department. Pennhurst in Chester County has a higher capacity but is second in population with 1,777.

The Polk staff, which collects some \$16 million a year in salaries, includes 996 patient care personnel, of which 880 are in direct contact with residents on a daily basis. The remaining 116 include doctors and other staffers who visit patients less frequently.

The other 823 positions are held by administrative, clerical and maintenance personnel at

the 2,116-acre facility in Venango County.

Legislation pending in the State Senate would add 250 employees to Polk's staff, but even that number would leave the institution short of the one-to-one ratio recommended by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Hospitals.

Actually, the patient-staff ratio probably is never better than 7 to 1 because of the three daily shifts and weekend coverage.

The per diem rate per patient paid to Polk is \$22.30, the lowest in the state. The highest is \$46.64 at Western State. The money comes from the state and federal governments and relatives.

Staff shortage is one of the reasons cited for restraints used at eight of the state's nine mental retardation facilities. At Polk, some patients were locked in wooden pens for several hours a day.

When Welfare Secretary Helene Wohlgenuth saw the pens during a surprise visit last week, she fired Polk's superintendent of 15 years, Dr. James McClelland.

Edward Carskadon, Mrs.

Wohlgenuth's executive secretary, yesterday said the emotional impact of the sight of the wooden pens played a large part in the decision to get rid of Dr. McClelland. He claims the pens, which had been used as long as he headed the institution, never created any problems with other welfare officials who knew of them.

Carskadon said there were other factors, however: "The whole point is that people are people and should be treated like human beings. It's an indication of a kind of approach that has been taken by Dr. McClelland."

He said that other facilities use straightjackets or strap patients to chairs to restrain them. One unnamed official reported that Hamburg State Hospital in Berks County has steel-ribbed cribs with sealed tops to confine adult patients.

The only institution which doesn't use restraints, Carskadon said, is White Haven in Luzerne County. The superintendent there, Dudley White, is acting head of Polk. One of White's first directives was reduction in the use of patient restraints at Polk.

Another problem at Polk, Carskadon said, is the overcrowding.

"At one time, beds were so close together that you had to go over the foot of the bed to get into the aisle," he said.

The Welfare Department's budget for the fiscal year beginning July 1 calls for opening one new facility, Southeastern, and expanding another, Embreeville, to accept retarded. The two institutions will take in some 485 patients from the other facilities.

Polk's population is expected to drop to 2,700 because of transfers. Its capacity is 1,784.

cc: Secretary  
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