

Patient Cage Draws Firing Of Doctor

HARRISBURG (UPI) — Pennsylvania Welfare Secretary Helene Wohlgemuth has fired a hospital superintendent after retarded patients were found locked in five-by-five wooden cages at Polk State School and Hospital.

Mrs. Wohlgemuth said the dismissal of Dr. James McClelland, 58, was effective May 1. She took the action following an unannounced visit to the hospital in northwestern Pennsylvania last Saturday.

"In a woman's day room was a cage made of wooden slats with a small door and a padlock," she said. "The cage was about five by five by five and inside sitting on the floor was a woman."

"In the men's ward, I saw men in 'play pens.' The pens also are about five feet high, more a corral, in order that they (patients) do not roam from the building."

McClelland, who has been superintendent at Polk for 15 years, said the charges that he mistreated patients were "completely unjustified and undeserved."

Mrs. Wohlgemuth called the cages "indefensible in this day and age."

"This is the epitome of dehumanization," she said. "Had we found such conditions in an interim care home, we should have closed it on the spot."

Interim care homes throughout the state have been the target of comprehensive Welfare Department investigations and changes due to several deaths and poor conditions.

McClelland said the cages were built in the 1950s and have been used "as a means of separating disturbed or aggressive patients" from other patients.

"While in the pens, the patients are under observation," he said. "While a man is in the pen he doesn't have to be put into a strait jacket."