Are mental health institutions actually helpful? Or do they just make us feel worse?

In America, if a person is in a terrible mental health situation and feels the want to attempt the act, they are instantly admitted to a mental institution of any state without their consent or consideration of the circumstances because "their life is at risk." But is it truly true when they promise that "your life will be so much better" or "You won't feel the need to end your life anymore"? What if doing so worsens the situation? If the patient believes they will never receive care, what will their future hold?

Mentally ill patients commonly consult psychiatric institutions as a last resort, but recent news reports serve as a reminder that all too frequently, these facilities aren't the safe space they should be.There have long been reports of poor mental health care. Due to the lack of information regarding patient safety, they also play a significant role. Historically, patients in mental hospitals have been mistreated and lived in bad conditions with medical neglect. This frequently results from a lack of resources, limited staffing, and ignorance of mental health issues. But how did we get here? Were mental institutions always a bad thing? Around the early 1800s, the first mental institution with "moral treatment" was built called the *Friends Asylum* located in Philadelphia, pennsylvania. This place was known as the first popular mental institution that cares for mentally ill patients that were taken in from their families to fix something. But due to the lack of knowledge of mental health, many improper and horrible treatment took place not only in the Friend's asylum but in other mental institutions as well. "Today, such treatments seem incredibly cruel. But during earlier times, professionals genuinely believed that they were helping patients..", Psychcentral reports.

Popular treatments like electric shock therapy, ice baths, and bloodletting were one of the first popular three when mental institutions were becoming popular in the late 1800s. But that only touches the tip of an inhumane iceberg. "Perhaps one of the earliest forms of treatment for mental illness, trephination, also called trepanation, involved opening a hole in the skull using an auger, bore, or even a saw. By some estimates, this treatment began 7,000 years ago. Although no diagnostic manual exists from that time, experts guess that this procedure to remove a small section of skull might have been aimed at relieving headaches, mental illness, or presumed demonic possession." reported by Everyday Health. Things like trechination, forced vomiting and purging, and Lobotomies (which is a procedure of disrupting brain circuits and medically remove the emotional part of the brain to help "cure" OCD, depression and emotion.), there have been such cases where people were sent here for the wrong reasons. From the 1800s to the 1900s, there were Cases where husbands were to send their wives to mental institutions and would want to perform a lobotomy on them because they were acting "too emotional". With the informed ace of bliss mental health was in, was there any progress since then? How about the 21st century?

From my experience, I remember the first time I was rushed to the hospital due to an attempt of me taking my own life on November 30, 2021. It was the worst day of my life. The first thing that happened was me waking up in the emergency room. They checked my body for any marks and put me in a gown. Even though I attempted, I never meant for it to be this far. I just remembered that I wanted help and needed to be heard. Being in the emergency room for three days, I only talked to a psychiatrist and a social worker. Talking to the social worker was the weirdest conversation of my life. Having one session, they were already ready to send me somewhere. I remembered being so confused. It was only my second day there. Since I was a minor, they talked to my family about it and my parents wanted to keep contact with me. To be frank, I didn't care where the social worker took me. I just wanted help. But was this the right direction to go? The plan was, taking me to a mental institution upstate, far from home, no research or anything. The process was scary. Was I really gonna go so quickly? Luckily, my sibling did some research in the hospital and practically saved my life. Patients held trauma and mistreatment from the hospital I was going to go to and after being informed this, my parents made the executive decision to not send me there. And thank god they did. They decided to do the opt out option where they check up with me with a therapist and a psychiatrist every week Tuesday and actually helped me at that time. But I can't help thinking about what could've happened if I went to that institution. Would my past mental health get worse? Would this past experience become a time of regret? This all stays a mystery and I'm glad it will stay that way.

There are so many stories of an experience of being in a mental institution causing greater trauma and horrible treatment for the patient and it has become too common. I mean literally, search up a review for each mental institution and it just shows the lack of care that is put into patients. As for this recent interview that I had with my oldest sibling, io, who is currently 27 years old and has been to two different mental institutions. They talked about two different incidents where there was a good and a bad mental institution. The first one they talked about was when they went to Gracie Square hospital in New York City, they stated,

"I've never been a huge fan of mental institutions so when I first went to Gracie square hospital I was somewhat nervous about what was going on. The first days in the Gracie square hospital, it was more unexpected than what it was. I was first isolated for 7 days for covid screening. They gave me breakfast and different types of pills like lexapro because of suicidal ideation, risperdone (first drug) and it didnt work out so they switched it to and the anti and drugs based on the zyprexa for the voises in my head and hullicatnations and mania and it worked and helped me ate more. I had issues with eating due to my depressive episodes."

"Okay that's great they focused on your health first. How did you feel about the medication? Were there any other strategies or help they offered? what happened after the covid screening?"

"They did a week on most of the drugs to see how it reacted to my body and mental health. During those 7 days, they gave me a social worker and a psychiatrist. I felt like it was a bit rushed to get into drugs. Therapists were everywhere on the floor. Everytime i asked for a therapist though, they came. After the 7 days, I was done with isolation, I could participate in the events and they had arts and crafts therapy, music therapy, meditation therapy, journaling therapy and I went to a few."

"Ohh, how was that?"

"It was actually great, it helped me alot with my thoughts and mentality."

"That's great, I didn't know they offered sessions like these, do you know did these classes work?

"Yeah, I was quite surprised too. How these classes would work was you would do a session with the therapist and would do art or music wherever it was. I spent a lot of time at the music and journaling sessions"

"Nice, I'm glad that helped. How do you feel overall about the staff at Grace"

"In my experience, my staff at grace give a fuck about us, like they actually did care about my well being. As a trans person, some of them actually respected me by understanding who I am and surprisingly identity wasn't ignored by some of them so i respect that. I was very surprised by my experience because apparently I was on the good floor of the hospital based on the online reviews my sister later told me and it made sense because I actually like my experience in Gracie square."

"Ohh Jennifer told you about that yeah I remember,and yes i'm glad they respected your identity." (Jennifer is our middle sister who informed Io about the hospital reviews). "Was there anything you felt off about being at Gracie Square?"

"One thing I would say, I remember there was a patient screaming every night at 3 am and the people would inject heer to sleep. I always thought that was weird but I spoke with her and she said she wanted medication based on the nightmares she got every night and she got medicine that actually helped her which was nice."

Overall, The experience my oldest sibling had about Gracie Square was a nice unexpected encounter they wouldn't expect from a normal institution. I feel as if more hospitals should focus on having more mental sessions for patients. The music, art, journaling therapy offered is something that lacks in most institutions and needs to be more of a funded focus.

Io also had an experience with another hospital back in 2021 at Bellevue hospital located in New York city. Lets see how this went:

"So how did you get admitted to this hospital? I know you self admitted yourself in Gracie square. Was Bellevue the same?"

"With Bellevue, I called 911 because I felt like jumping off the train tracks. And they sent you wherever, the ambulance pulled up and took me to Bellvue with a bed."

"I know, I heard and I'm sorry, I'm glad you're doing better. How was it like being in Bellevue this time around?"

"Bellevue was a traumatizing experience and it freaked me out. One of the biggest things that stood out to me was how they were treating the patients. Anytime anyone lashed out in any way, the patients would be held down and restrained and completely isolated and injected. I felt as if they were treating people like animals and not humans. I was afraid that was gonna happen to me and slept the whole time so they would never do that to me. And it was extremely difficult to even do that due to the constant screaming going on. I remember thinking I do want help but not in this environment."

"That's horrible? How long did you have to deal with that?"

"I was there for 6 days and it was so traumatizing, I was glad that they never officially admitted me."

"Oh wow, I would be glad too. How were those 6 days? Walk me through it if you're comfortable talking about it."

"It's okay,I don't mind talking about this because I want them to be called out and be changed. The first day I was there, the uniform didn't fit. One of the psychiatrists saw me and talked about the meds I was on. I never forgot her asking me, "So what's stopping you from killing yourself?" and it triggered me because i didn't expect that coming from her and it made me have more suicidal ideation. My second day, I got my meds and on the third to fourth day, they missed my meds and I had to ask for them during that day. They thought I didn't have insurance so I didn't get fully admitted on the 6th day and I'm glad because I didn't want to stay any longer."

"Did Bellevue also have sessions for mental health?"

"No classes or sessions like the Gracie square offered like music therapy etc. I felt somewhat ignored and the only time I talked to a real therapist was on my last day."

"Till the last day? That's horrible. How was the staff overall?"

"They weren't all as good. I remember one of the nurses was making fun of the patients saying, "if you're gonna killyorself why don't you do it?", and this one nurse saying the other day, " I wish I can just grab them and hit them but i can't because there are cameras" responding to a patient who was repeatedly saying "i want to go home" I felt like they didn't really take their job seriously.I felt like they should close the bellevue because they were not helping anyone at all and making them worse. It has been so traumatizing that now everytime I hear an ambulance siren it would remind me of this experience.``

I was extremely upset at how they and the patients were handled because they deserved more after hearing about the experience my sibling had with Bellevue. Background checks on staff members and their qualifications should be one of the other main areas that mental hospitals concentrate on right now. In addition to monitoring the patients, some of the personnel (nurses, psychiatrists, etc.) should also be checked for how well they care for the patients. The most important criteria for these mental hospitals is how the patients are treated and how they are progressing. Help and attention are needed.

There has been lots of progress historically with mental institutions with their form of medications, there will always be a continuous lack of treatment and care with patients who need mental help. No patient should be gathering trauma nor no progress being made for their mental health. Creating a mental and physical plan for their needs, a mental clarity space, and an overall feeling of being in a better space of where they are at life is what mental hospitals need to focus on, not on patients feeling worse.

Oped written and revised by
Natalie Hernandez