

Attendant claims changes are making Oak Ridge less safe

A 17-year Oak Ridge attendant said last Friday he and other attendants are frustrated by what he described as growing emphasis on the hospital aspect of the maximum security Oak Ridge psychiatric hospital.

Garry Lenehan, a former president of the union local which represents the Ridge's 220 attendants, said that the "big push" to make Oak Ridge look and feel like a hospital is at the expense of security.

"If I went from Oak Ridge to Penetanguishene General Hospital and said I would run PGH like Oak Ridge, it couldn't be done. I don't expect PGH to go to Oak Ridge and say, 'Run it like a hospital.'"

Attendants with many years of experience have been replaced by registered nurses as the top authority on Oak Ridge's psychiatric wards. The nurses are being used as window dressing by the authorities, Lenehan said. An RN's training is mostly medical; they don't have the experience or educational background needed to work with psychiatric patients, he claims. The attendants are the only group which deals with the patients 24 hours a day. Unified nursing is taking precedence over the welfare of Oak Ridge patients, he said. The RNs are "victims" too.

Placing nurses in charge of wards is part of a move to change the atmosphere inside Oak Ridge. But Lenehan claims nurses are wasted inside Oak Ridge because only the small part of their training involving psychiatric nursing is of use in that setting. Meanwhile Huronia District Hospital, he said, and Toronto hospitals, need RNs.

New uniforms to be introduced for the attendants will cost attendants some of their authority, and possibly contribute to their injury, he said.

The attendant's uniform of authority - figure blue shirt and grey pants is going to be replaced with a red shirt and grey pants. The shirt is a type that wouldn't look out of place on a golfer or a jogger, he said. In practical terms,

from one end of a ward, attendants and patients will be less distinguishable in the event of a disturbance. Patients can wear whatever clothing they like.

Informal clothing will have a detrimental psychological effect too, he said. "If policemen walked around with golf shirts instead of uniforms, would you know they were policemen?"

Several severe assaults and a stabbing of one patient by another patient have happened since authority in the wards passed to the nurses, Lenehan said.

"Everything seems to be changing. The patients don't like what they are seeing either," with the exception of the patients who try to take maximum advantage of their environment.

Lenehan called for a way to assign responsibility for the release of a patient when that patient's release is followed by an incident. Where is the government's responsibility, he asked?

The government has to be held responsible for the result of releasing patients who should not be released. The government is being "sucked in" by psychiatrists and psychologists, Lenehan said.

The surrounding community is becoming part of the treatment of Oak Ridge patients. The Mental Health Centre which includes Oak Ridge is the town's largest employer. "It's nice to have clean

dollars, clean air, but there's always a payoff somewhere," Lenehan warned.

"Social workers and psychologists working in Oak Ridge are being paid for nothing," Lenehan said. People in a controlled setting such as Oak Ridge do exactly as they are told. Their behaviour, when they are free, can't be predicted in a closed setting. "We're paying a lot of professional people for nothing."

Lenehan's opinion is that only one in 15 psychiatric patients' mental problems can be helped.

Management is the worst he has seen in his 17 years. Of his successor as union local president, Lenehan said, "No one is very happy with him right now."

Comparing the physical environment of Oak Ridge and the Barrie Jail, Lenehan called Oak Ridge the Hilton of the North. "You're better to murder someone to go to Oak Ridge than sit in the dungeon at the Barrie Jail."

Lenehan has concerns about the release of patients, concerns which he can't state in public because of the oath of secrecy which prevents Oak Ridge employees from talking about patients. Oak Ridge employees, for example, can't answer as simple a question as whether a particular individual is a patient.

Lenehan is suspicious that the government wants Oak Ridge to be unworkable in order to have an excuse to close it.



Inside looking out

Stephanie Vaillancourt was happy to stay still last Wednesday for a passing Midland Times photographer. She and her fellow Prime Time Nursery

School friends were enjoying out of doors a fine September day.

WILLIAM P. TAWS, LL.B.
and
MARK E. KOWALSKY, B.A., LL.B.
are pleased to announce the relocation of their law offices under the name
TAWS, KOWALSKY ASSOCIATES
Barristers, Solicitors, Notaries
at 362 Midland Avenue
P.O. Box 787
Midland, Ontario
L4R 4P4
(705) 526-7865
Effective Date: September 14, 1987



Dan Waters

Your New Democrat
for
**MUSKOKA
GEORGIAN BAY**

Fighting for Fair Auto
Insurance and Fair Taxes

*For rides to polls

Please call:
526-7034
Campaign Headquarters
510 Bay St., Midland

ontario hydro



Power Interruption

Ontario Hydro wishes to announce there will be a 3 hour power interruption from 1:00 p.m. until 4:00 p.m. Thursday, September 10, 1987. In the case of inclement weather an alternate date will be established and the interruption will be readvertised.

Areas affected: **Fuller Avenue, Portage Park, Gilwood Bay, all of the Midland Point Area and Present Island.**

We regret this inconvenience to our customers, however, this interruption is required to connect a new Distribution Station which will improve service to your area.