

# 'DUMPING GROUND FOR UNWANTED CHILDREN,' SCIENTOLOGISTS SAY

Lake Alice Hospital is being used as a dumping ground for unwanted children, some of whom are receiving electric shock treatment, claims the leader of the Scientology-backed "Citizens Commission on Human Rights," Mr Tony Wilson of Auckland.

One boy at the hospital had also been locked up for four days on his own for misbehaviour, said Mr Wilson, who was one of the five members of the commission, which toured Lake Alice Hospital on Wednesday.

The commission was concerned that with the closure of the Child Welfare Department, Lake Alice was being used as a dumping ground for unwanted children who had been adequately cared for previously by the Child Welfare Department, Mr Wilson said.

## 'DISTURBED'

"These children are now being treated by drug therapy and some with electric shock treatment," he said.

"The use of electric shock treatment on children disturbed the commission. We have not been able to get an explanation of how shock treatment works exactly, and the patients we spoke to at each institution found it abhorrent."

Mr Wilson said that the medical superintendent of Lake Alice, Dr S.L. Pugmire, had curbed its use over recent years and had explained to the commission that many shocks could bring about brain damage and that, logically, smaller amounts would produce damage on a reduced scale. Dr

Pugmire had told the commission that therefore even one shock treatment would damage the brain proportionately, Mr Wilson said.

"This is one treatment we would like to see fully investigated scientifically as after 30 years there is no satisfactory explanation of its use," Mr Wilson said. "This puts it in the field of experimentation, not therapy."

## CHILDREN

Lake Alice was forced to assume the function of the Child Welfare Department, where 200 beds in numerous welfare homes were now used for other purposes, he said.

"The unwanted children whom Dr Pugmire considered had been adequately cared for and rehabilitated previously by Welfare Department staff were now a charge on Lake Alice Hospital, necessitating the building of a school and the upgrading of accommodation," Mr Wilson said. "This would appear on the surface to be a result of muddled thinking where one problem is replaced by another necessitating extra large expenditure of public monies."

"Dr Pugmire stated that many geriatric patients should also not be there, but no-one else would take them."

Mr Wilson said that more homes were needed where these elderly people could live out their remaining years in dignity and not in the company of the chronically mentally ill and mentally retarded.

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# 'Dumping ground for unwanted children'

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Mr Wilson said that specific areas of complaints concerning the human rights of mental patients given to the commission members were:

- The continuous lack of privacy by being monitored by television in the maximum security block which a patient complained "got you down by the constant surveillance."
- Geriatric patients who complained of the regimented life with insufficient outside trips. One said he worked hard all his life and the pension ceased on entrance to the institution. All he got was 70 cents a week comfort money.
- One boy had been locked up for four days on his own for misbehaviour.
- A tobacco allowance was given to penal prisoners, but in institutions patients did not receive it. This was an anomaly which discriminated against mental patients.
- Children felt that injections were used too freely. Dr Pugmire had stated they were used for treatment only, but some felt it was used as a punishment also.
- Patients expressed concern that they were kept in ignorance of the treatment and changes of treatment. They would like to be informed as in a medical doctor-patient relationship.
- Toilets in the maximum security block were open for half-hour periods and there were periods when they were closed and access to a toilet was not possible.
- No equitable wages given for work done by patients, some of whom worked from 9.30 am

until 3 pm daily. The "wage" was approximately \$1 per week.

- No incentive pay given for work done in the workshops. The goods were sold and the money went somewhere, but not into the hands of the patient producing the goods.

Mr Wilson said that at the hospital the standard of living facilities was of a high standard and hygiene was excellent in all areas visited by the commission. The general comfort of the patients was well cared for in terms of recreation and the living facilities.

## SHORT-COMINGS

However, the shortcomings of the mental health system were again evident, Mr Wilson said.

After tours of three mental institutions — Kingseat, Tokanui and Lake Alice — the commission had not been able to obtain a satisfactory answer as to how the mental patient achieved a permanent cure through psychiatric treatment if he must be institutionalised or be on drugs possibly for the remainder of his life.

The patient was left with a dependency on either the institution or drugs, Mr Wilson said.

Dr Pugmire said last night that to say unwanted children were "dumped at Lake Alice" was an oversimplification of what was happening.

He said it was correct that when the Child Welfare Department was closed the large residential schools previously used were not transferred with the department to the total welfare services, and officers did not have access to the same numbers of beds they had previously.

He said that when a child was found in need of help, the child psychiatrists referred to whatever beds were available, and the children at Lake Alice had all been referred by the child psychiatrist who had been worried about the degree of disturbance in the children.

## 'NOT ORDINARY'

"They are not ordinary children with nothing wrong with them," Dr Pugmire said.

He said he did not know if electric shock treatment had been administered to any children in recent months.

"If any children have received electric shock treatment it would be for a very special reason and it would be quite exceptional," Dr Pugmire said.

The treatment of the children came under the child psychiatrist who was in charge of his own treatment, Dr Pugmire said.

"There is a general directive that electric shock treatment be kept to the absolute minimum necessary," he said.

Commenting on the claim that a boy had been locked up on his own for four days for misbehaviour, Dr Pugmire said he did not know if this was correct.

"It certainly is true that a boy might be put in a single room for 15 minutes for playing up or attacking people, but there is a general directive that a child should not be detained for longer than 20 minutes if he becomes hysterical, and then he should be forgiven for anything he has done, regardless."

Dr Pugmire said that some of the children being treated were unreliable. Some were deluded and some were deliberate exaggerators.