

The Mental Health Service of Hong Kong

W H Lo

Consultant Psychiatrist in charge of Mental Health Service, Hong Kong Government

History

Before 1949 there was no special treatment for the mentally ill in Hong Kong. Patients were sent to the “lunatic asylum” which provided only custodial care, and the problem of overcrowding was solved by periodic transfer of patients to China. This was brought to an abrupt end by the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949. At this time a qualified psychiatrist, the late Prof. P.M. Yap became available and was appointed the first Medical Superintendent of the Mental Hospital.

Active planning was then started and there has been an orderly expansion of the Mental Health Service, providing mental health care for a rapidly growing population. The change in administrative policy and the introduction of modern methods of treatment, especially with the advent of psychotropic drugs, have demonstrated the value of psychiatry which has gradually won acceptance both from Government and the public.

Structure of the Mental Health Service

The psychiatric facilities in Hong Kong are outlined below in Table 1.

Table 1

<i>Mental Health Centres</i> (out-patients & day centre)	<i>Psychiatric Hospitals</i> (in-patients)	<i>Psychiatric Units</i> (in-patients, outpatients & day centre)	<i>Psychiatric Clinics</i> (out-patients)
Hong Kong Psychiatric Centre (H.Q. of M.H.S.) (1971*)	Castle Peak Hospital (1921 beds) (1961*)	Kowloon Hospital Psychiatric Unit (67 beds) (1971*)	Queen Elizabeth Hospital Psychiatric Clinic (1962*)
Yaumatei Psychiatric Centre (1967*)	Lai Chi Kok Hospital (300 beds) (1974*)	† Queen Mary Hosp. Psychiatric Unit (15 beds) (1971*)	Tsuen Wan Psychiatric Clinic (1962*)
	**Siu Lam Psychiatric Centre (200 beds for mentally ill offenders) (1972*)	‡ United Christian Hospital Psychiatric Unit (28 beds) (1974*)	Miscellaneous Sunday Psychiatric Clinics
	**Siu Lam Psychiatric Centre (200 beds for the severely subnormal) (1972*)		

* Year of its opening.

** The Mental Health Service provides visiting psychiatrists to these 2 institutions.

† Run by the University Psychiatric Department.

‡ Run by a subvented hospital.

Taken from a handout of Mental Health Service, M.H.G. 61/76 (revised).

Source: W H Lo (1976). In W H Lo, W Chan, K S Ma, A Wong, K K Yeung (Ed.), *Perspective in Mental Health: Hong Kong, 1976* (pp. 6-9).

The great majority of the facilities are directly administered by the Mental Health Service, a sub-department of the Government Medical and Health Department. Generally speaking, psychiatric services are provided along the same lines as in western countries. The main difference is the relative lack of psychiatric staff in Hong Kong.

Psychiatric Hospitals

Castle Peak Hospitals was opened in 1961. It was originally designed to accommodate 1,000 patients, divided approximately equally between the sexes. In 1967 the bed complement was increased to 1,242 to meet the growing need for in-patient treatment. The hospital is up-to-date and one of the few psychiatric hospitals in the world built after the Second World War. The buildings are located in spacious grounds and all the wards have their own gardens.

It is still the only hospital in Hong Kong for the full-time care of all types of psychiatric patients. Except for two wards in which patients involved in court proceedings are detained, all the wards are in various degrees 'open'. Convalescent patients are allowed to move freely within the hospital. Some patients travel daily to work in factories while some others work in the adjacent New Life Farm.

All methods of psychiatric treatment are administered. Psychopharmacotherapy and electroplexy as well as social measures and work therapy remain the mainstay of treatment. Multi-disciplinary approach is emphasized with teamwork consisting of doctors, nurses, occupational therapists, social workers and clinical psychologists. A variety of social and recreative activities are organized for the patients. They have their own social club and recently publish their own magazines at regular intervals.

In the first few years it provided a Drug Addiction Centre which pioneered a voluntary system of treatment of narcotic addiction.

Lai Chi Kok Hospital was until very recently an infectious disease hospital. Following the transfer of its infectious disease unit to the Princess Margaret Hospital, Lai Chi Kok Hospital has been used as a psychiatric hospital to accommodate the overflow of patients from Castle Peak Hospital. About 100 long-stay psychiatric patients requiring minimal nursing care were transferred there in late 1974, and more will be transferred in early 1976 up to a maximum of about 300 patients.

Mental Health Centres

The *Hong Kong Psychiatric Centre* in which is located the Headquarters of the Service provides treatment for both day-patients and out-patients including follow-up cases from Castle Peak Hospital. It is the reference centre on Hong Kong Island for the majority of voluntary patients for admission. The Centre moved into its present modern premises in 1971.

The *Yaumatei Psychiatric Centre* opened in 1967 provides similar services in Kowloon. Its facilities include a part-time child psychiatric clinic.

Psychiatric Units

The *Kowloon Hospital Psychiatric Unit* was opened in 1971. It is located in the new wing of the Kowloon Hospital and provides a comprehensive psychiatric service in a general hospital setting, with an out-patients' section, a day centre and an in-patients' section. Admission and discharge procedures are on informal basis.

Psychiatric Clinics

Full-time out-patient sessions are held in the Mental Health Centres and Kowloon Hospital Psychiatric Unit. Part-time clinics are also available in various parts of Hong Kong.

The Mental Health Service of Hong Kong

Professional Personnel working in the Mental Health Service (excluding Queen Mary Hospital Psychiatric Unit and United Christian Hospital Psychiatric Unit)

Year: 1975
 Psychiatrists: 33
 Clinical Psychologists: 3
 Social workers: 18
 Occupational therapists: 8
 Nurses (including student nurses): 570

Of the 33 psychiatrists, 10 hold psychiatric qualifications, M.R.C. Psych. and/or D.P.M. - all from England. Apart from these, there are 4 psychiatrists in private practice and 8 in non-Government psychiatric departments.

Demand for Mental Health Care

The increasing demand for mental health care provided by the Mental Health Service is shown below in Table 2.

Table 2

<i>Year</i>	<i>New out-patients</i>	<i>Old out-patients</i>	<i>Out-patient attendances</i>	<i>New admissions</i>	<i>Re-admissions</i>	<i>Day patients admitted</i>
1949	306	-	-	419	148	-
1954	468	-	1,656	749	274	-
1959	752	-	6,406	1,024	473	-
1964	1,433	2,846 (1965 figure)	22,854	1,353	942	297
1969	2,628	9,109	72,507	1,470	2,177	400
1974	3,019	14,606	109,926	1,868	2,695	464

Calculated from these figures, it can be seen that in the past 25 years new out-patients have increased 10 times (by 987%), new admissions 4.5 times (by 446%) and re-admissions 18 times (by 1,821%). During this period the population increase was only 2.3 times (229%).

Teaching and Training

The Mental Health Service works in close cooperation with the University Psychiatric Department and offers valuable clinical facilities and personnel in the training of medical students. The post-graduate training in Castle Peak Hospital and Kowloon Hospital Psychiatric Unit is recognized by the Examining Board, England for D.P.M., and psychiatric trainees with 3 years' experience are eligible for taking M.R.C. Psych. examination.

Training in psychiatric nursing is based on Castle Peak Hospital and the Diploma in Mental Health Nursing is recognized in the United Kingdom. There is in-service training for social workers and the medical staff also give lectures to health visitors, general nurses, paramedical professionals or even teachers.

Liaison with other Government Departments and Voluntary Groups

The Mental Health Service works closely with a number of Government Departments, particularly the Social Welfare Department and the Special Education Section of the Education Department.

The Mental Health Service also works in close co-operation with a number of voluntary bodies that have their main interest in some aspect of psychiatry. These include the Society

W H Lo

for the Aid and Rehabilitation of Drug Addicts, the New Life Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association, the Mental Health Association of Hong Kong, and the Hong Kong Psychiatric Association which functions as the professional society in Hong Kong for psychiatrists and medical men interested in psychiatry. The New Life Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association provides for discharged mental patients a farm, two half-way houses for both men and women and a sheltered workshop. The Mental Health Association of Hong Kong operates a male half-way house and is engaged in mental health education of the public.

Legislation

Legislation relevant to psychiatric practice in Hong Kong is contained in the Mental Health Ordinance, Cap. 136. This is modelled in the main on the Mental Health Act 1959 in England. The main effect of the Ordinance is simplification of admission and discharge procedures in the gazetted psychiatric hospital.

Patients are admitted either voluntarily or compulsorily, and in recent years about half belong to each category. The continued detention of most patients admitted compulsorily is on a voluntary basis. Informal admission and hospitalization is, however, practiced in psychiatric units in the general hospitals.

The Mental Health Ordinance has improved the proceedings in dealing with the criminally insane as well as with mentally disordered person's property.

Research

Research work mainly centres on comparative psychiatry, descriptive psychiatry and follow-up study. Published papers include those on latak, Koro, the possession syndrome, suicide and drug addiction in Hong Kong, the natural history of obsessional illness in Chinese, on Huntington's Chorea, Gilles de la Tourette's disease, tuberosc sclerosis and clinical trials of psychotropic drugs.