



Closing the Asylums: Causes and Consequences of the Deinstitutionalization Movement

George Paulson

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One of the most significant medical and social initiatives of the twentieth century was the demolition of the traditional state hospitals that housed most of the mentally ill, and the placement of the patients out into the community. The causes of this deinstitutionalization included both idealism and legal pressures, newly effective medications, the establishment of nursing and group homes, the woeful inadequacy of the aging giant hospitals, and an attitudinal change that emphasized environmental and social factors, not organic ones, as primarily responsible for mental illness. Though closing the asylums promised more freedom for many, encouraged community acceptance and enhanced outpatient opportunities, there were unintended consequences: increased homelessness, significant prison incarcerations of the mentally ill, inadequate community support or governmental funding. This book is written from the point of view of an academic neurologist who has served 60 years as an employee or consultant in typical state mental institutions in North Carolina and Ohio.

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