THE MANAGEMENT OF CONVALESCENT NEUROTICS AT
THE NEUROSIS WING, 101 MILITARY CONVALESCENT
DEPOT.

BY

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The History and Purpose of the Unit.—The object of the Neurosis Wing was to provide
active methods of physical and mental rehabilitation for cases of neurosis on discharge from
hospital. The transfer to this Wing of patients no longer in need of individual hospital treat­
ment also served to relieve the pressure on the beds of military and E.M.S. psychiatric
hospitals. The type of patient considered suitable for the unit was the psychiatric
casualty likely to be fit for duty within twenty-eight days. In order to maintain a high
standard of morale, it was most important that cases should not be sent to the Neurosis Wing
who were considered medically unfit for further service.

The Neurosis Wing opened up to receive the casualties that it was anticipated would
follow D-Day. The first patients were actually received in May, 1944. At the busiest
period there were about 700 patients; the weekly intake being about 200. During recent
months, as would be expected, the numbers steadily decreased, owing to the change in policy
with regard to the low-categoried neurotic of doubtful value to the Army and because of
the diminished supply of acute battle neurosis casualties.

Location.—The Neurosis Wing was in Kempston Barracks, the peacetime Depot of the
Beds and Herts Regiment. It was about one mile from the rest of the Convalescent Depot,
which is at Grange Camp.

Establishment.—The patients in the Neurosis Wing formed "E" Coy. of the 101 M.C.D.
and the administrative work was carried out by a company commander and his regimental
staff. The Home Psychiatric Pool provided a specialist in psychiatry, a military social
worker, mental nursing orderlies and clerks.

The unit was fortunate in having warrant officers and N.C.O.s of the Army Physical
Training Corps and Army Education Corps who were exceptionally capable of dealing with
neurotics and obtaining their co-operation and interest.

Source of Intake.—After the Neurosis Wing of 102 Military Convalescent Depot had closed
this was the only Neurosis Wing at a Convalescent Depot and cases were received from all
military and E.M.S. psychiatric hospitals. In addition, repatriated prisoners of war
who displayed mild neurotic reactions or a degree of maladjustment not necessitating hospital
treatment could be sent to the Neurosis Wing direct from the 45th Division.

The Training Programme.—Under the supervision of the A.P.T.C., the patients had
physical training, organized games and route marches. They also took an active part in
inter-company games and every week they provided a team for competitive sports. The
education periods consisted of lectures, discussions, a "Brains Trust," films and regular visits
to factories in the neighbourhood.

The Grading of Patients.—Every patient on arrival from hospital reported to Grange Camp
and came down to the Neurosis Wing the following day. The day’s intake came to the
psychiatrist's office in the afternoon. If a fairly large number, they were seen first as a Group. It was explained to them why they had been sent to the Neurosis Wing, what they were expected to do, and they were given a general talk on the benefits they would feel if they co-operated with the training and took an active part in the sport and discussions. They were also encouraged to see the Welfare Officer immediately, should they have any problem, and not wait until they were about to depart so that nothing could be done in time. Then each man was seen individually and his documents from hospital were available. An entry was made on a card which was the only permanent record that the Wing had of any particular patient. On this document a patient's progress through the Depot was recorded. The other documents went to his unit with him when he left the Convalescent Depot. The new arrival was placed in Grade I. This was entered on his personal card which he carried with him and which also had stamped on it the tests which he was expected to pass before he left the Wing. The intake that had arrived during one week were all seen the following Monday when they were made Grade 2 and passed fit to go on leave. On their return from leave they were Graded 3. Nine days later they were Graded 4 and the week after that they were marked available for posting. In this way each man had about five weeks on the strength of the Neurosis Wing before he was made available for posting. Any patient could be kept back in his grade if it was considered that he would benefit by further training. After they had been made available for posting, they left the Neurosis Wing for the main Convalescent Depot. Patients in an “A” category, including A.I (H.S.), went to “C” Company, where they under­went further training until they were posted. Patients in Category “B” or “C” went to “F” Company, where they were largely employed on duties in the Depot until their posting came through from Records.

Patients could ask for a personal interview with the psychiatrist any time they liked and any patient whose ability to adjust to the life of the Neurosis Wing appeared dubious was given an appointment as there was plenty of time to carry out individual therapeutic inter­views where necessary.

Occupational Therapy.—Occupational therapy was found useful for suitable cases. A scheme was devised for a special hut to be built for occupational therapy, but this never materialized. There was, however, a handicraft hut open every evening at Grange Camp and it was also possible to employ men in the Depot on suitable duties. The type of patient who benefited in this way could be roughly classified in the following manner: Men who would obtain reassurance and regain their self-confidence if given creative work to do, such as work in the handicraft hut or in the Depot Magazine Office. Then there were men who needed some sedative occupation, such as gardening, where they could work on their own at their own pace. Other patients benefited by the continual distraction of such jobs as working in the Salvation Army canteen. Patients of defective intelligence, who were due for posting to the Pioneer Corps, were employed on simple fatigues or labouring duties. These were some of the classes of patient for whom the normal training programme was modified. It was possible to employ men at the Education Centre, on carpentry, or in the “One-O-One Magazine” Office, apart from the usual run of employed jobs in a large unit.

Patients were constantly encouraged to take an active part in the training during the day and in recreational activity in the evening. In a unit of this type the patient must be given the impression that he is being handled as an individual. At this stage, when he has left the shelter of hospital, it is of the greatest importance for a patient to feel that he is a valuable member of the community and a person whom the community requires to fit into a social environment. It is necessary to watch for the inadequate and find suitable duties for him. In the same way the shy, retiring and introverted must be encouraged to take part in group discussions. In addition to the activities of the Neurosis Wing itself, there were ample entertainments carried on in Grange Camp in the way of dances, E.N.S.A. and film shows. Inter-company games, both indoor and outdoor, were encouraged. The competitive spirit introduced by inter-company sports is of value to the morale of neurotic patients.
The Management of Convalescent Neurotics

Having patients for several weeks at a Neurosis Wing after their discharge from hospital, apart from giving them valuable opportunity for physical and mental rehabilitation, also enables the psychiatrist to watch their readjustment to a military environment and more accurate assessment of their category can be made.

During recent weeks repatriated prisoners of war were received either from Southern Hospital, Dartford, or from 45th Division. These prisoners of war presented the usual features and problems. Their predominant residual symptoms were self-conscious, dislike of company, difficulty in concentrating, absentmindedness and a feeling of being restless and unsettled. The majority responded to the facilities afforded by the Neurosis Wing and, once their co-operation had been obtained, they derived benefit from the active life and from the greater freedom than it had been possible to give them in hospital. Some of them were at first morose, disgruntled and aggressive and had been sent here on account of disciplinary problems that they had created in hospital. They were encouraged to throw themselves hard into the training and it was especially these prisoners of war who applied to join the special advanced P.T. squad in the Depot.

Disposal.—An analysis showing the disposal of patients during the quarter ending September 30, 1945, reveals that out of 344 patients, 318 (92.4 per cent) returned to duty, 10 (2.9 per cent) were readmitted to psychiatric hospitals, 9 (2.6 per cent) were boarded category “E.” There were 3 admissions to military (Mental) hospitals, 1 transfer to a general hospital, 2 deserters and 1 release under Class B.

The Neurosis Wing ceased to admit patients on November 1, 1945, and closed on November 15, 1945, after a life of eighteen months, during which 4,645 patients had passed through.
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