

# Sacramento Bee

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## 'Human Zoos' . . . MD Condemns

By SIGRID BATHEN  
Bee Staff Writer

The chairman of a special advisory committee appointed by Gov. Brown to examine conditions at Camarillo State Hospital says California's mental health system is uncoordinated, outdated and wasteful of taxpayers' dollars. He calls state hospitals "human zoos."

In a report to Brown, Dr. Louis Simpson says the entire system could be reformed at no additional cost — by simply redirecting the half-billion dollars or so that the state already spends on mental health care each

year.

"Many programs that are needed to upgrade the mental health system and reduce the costly population at state hospitals already exist," Simpson wrote the governor. "Through coordination and fine tuning of programs, many changes can be made without spending a dime."

Simpson's report is the result of three months' work by a six-member volunteer committee appointed by Brown last December to look at conditions in the controversial Ventura County facility for the mentally ill, disabled and retarded.

Some members also viewed other facilities in the 11-hospital state network which houses some 16,000 patients.

The committee was formed about the time of a highly publicized Ventura grand jury investigation into more than 100 Camarillo patient deaths in the previous three years. Eight indictments resulted: but all but one misdemeanor charge has been dismissed.

The hospital system also has been the focus of an intensive state health department probe of more than 1,000 patient deaths over the same three-

year period. That investigation resulted in widespread staff and policy shakeups throughout the system.

But Simpson says it's not enough, that nothing much can ever be changed until the system itself is completely overhauled.

"The system has grown so archaic," he said in a Bee interview "that it is an affront to modern psychiatry and to the people who need help. It is a result of neglect and indifference . . ."

"There are wards at Camarillo with  
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50 or 60 patients and three people taking care of them. I saw patients not getting good treatment, people being warehoused. It reminded me of the county jails . . .

"There are some very talented people working in the hospitals, but they are overwhelmed. They are forced to cut corners. The system saps their morale and their ingenuity."

The 30-year-old psychiatrist, who led a successful 1975 doctors' strike for better patient care and facilities in the Los Angeles County hospitals, is director of inpatient care at the Central City Mental Health Center in Los Angeles.

Although he praised Camarillo's new director, Clinton Rust, and said the health department has made "administrative improvements" in the hospitals, Simpson contends that serious problems remain.

He said some wards at Camarillo are overcrowded with spillover admissions from nearby Metropolitan State Hospital in Los Angeles, and that patients are being released too soon without treatment. He said a recent Brown directive to increase hospital staffing is "totally inadequate" and urged a complete revision of state staffing standards which he said are obsolete.

"Parts of California state mental hospitals are human zoos," he wrote the governor. "The care is custodial. The patients often do not receive treatment. It is impossible to treat 50 or 60 patients on one ward . . ."

"It is a system choked on paperwork, ridiculous rules, pie in the sky projects. It is a product of neglect, lack of vision . . . One could fill 20 volumes on what is wrong with the state mental hospitals."

## State Hospitals

Simpson said he has had no official response from the governor's office to the suggestions in his report, which was made directly to Brown last month.

"It appears that the issue is now on the back burner," Simpson said.

The governor, who was accompanied by Simpson when Brown made an impromptu tour of Camarillo last December, said he referred the psychiatrist to the office of state health officials. Raymond

Procunier, chief state health administrator, said he met with members of the committee last month but had not seen Simpson's written suggestions to the governor. He said he could not comment on them until he had.

Brown said he met with Simpson last month and suggested he meet with health officials. "I didn't pass it (the written recommendations) on because I sent him over in person," Brown said.

"I want them first to sit down and talk. I have not been informed by Lou that there is any reason for me to step in. It's very important at what time I intervene. There have been some complaints that I intervene too soon . . ."

"He (Simpson) is my adviser, I put him in there because I wanted a non-bureaucratic approach to the health care system . . . His function is to stir the pot and to cause a little trouble, to change the complacency, to move the bureaucracy . . . to provide a link to the community."

The governor said he shares many of Simpson's views about the state mental health system, but he did not officially endorse the psychiatrist's recommendations. He said problems in the system are "pervasive," and described state hospitals and prisons as "dumping grounds for a society that is too busy getting and spending to care what happens to its weaker members."



Angeles County as a model because "it has 35 per cent of population and 35 per cent of the state mental health budget."

From that point, he recommends "placing everything under a regional system and deemphasizing the role of the state hospital." He said each hospital should have half its present patient load and be used only for special programs or to house seriously ill and disabled patients who require long-term care — with most people being treated in smaller community facilities.

To accomplish that, he says board and care homes would have to be upgraded throughout the state, 24-hour "psychiatric emergency teams" established, and additional services such as day treatment centers, halfway houses and homemaker services provided.

And, he said, a careful look must be taken at duplication of services by local and state agencies.

Under the heading "Sacramento," he says in the report that the state health department "appears to be in a state of continuous chaos" and should be "streamlined" to eliminate unnecessary layers of administration.

"Sacramento," he wrote, "is responsible for sending a barrage of complicated, confusing, conflicting administrative directives to the state hospitals."

In the hospitals themselves, he says, "there are usually four layers of directors — big chiefs carrying clip boards." Those "layers," he said, should be reduced to one.

He criticized the state civil service system, which he contends "rewards longevity and mediocre performance while at the same time making it almost impossible to fire the lazy malingering on the staff."

He also says "needless paperwork" must be eliminated in the hospitals, staffing increased and staff quality and morale improved.

"There must be developed ways to increase the motivation and professionalism of the workers in the mental health system," he said in the report. "Many workers have cynical attitudes about conditions."

Brown expressed some reservations about Simpson's belief that too many people with serious mental problems are released too soon from state hospitals without proper treatment. He said there are "civil liberties problems" in requiring longer commitments.

A major theme of Simpson's critique is that there are too many "mini-systems" competing for the state's mental health dollars, and too little coordination among state and local programs. Brown agreed, adding that "people fall through the cracks" as a result.

"The system," Brown said, "is what is insane."

To revamp it, Simpson recommends the state adopt a "prototype" of mental health care, using Los