

Images in Psychiatry



The Payne Whitney Clinic

On Oct. 1, 1932, the Payne Whitney Psychiatric Clinic of The New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center opened its doors (1). While psychiatric care had a venerable tradition at The New York Hospital dating back to the late eighteenth century, psychiatric services had been segregated from the general hospital since 1821, with the establishment of the Bloomingdale Asylum (now the Westchester Division). In 1899, 5 years after the Bloomingdale Asylum moved from Manhattan to White Plains, Samuel B. Lyon, medical superintendent, began to advocate for an institution based at the main hospital in New York City, so as to provide short-term treatment of acute mental illness. Lyon also advocated for an academic affiliation so that this would be a "new centre for investigating all the questions connected with the causes, treatment and care of the insane." Lyon's vision would take three decades to become a reality. In 1927, Payne Whitney, a member of The New York Hospital Board of Governors, died, leaving a bequest to fund "neurologic and psychiatric work." One month later The New York Hospital formally associated with Cornell University Medical College. From these events, the Payne Whitney Psychiatric Clinic and the Cornell University Medical College Department of Psychiatry would be born.

Designed in a neo-Gothic style, the 104-bed Payne Whitney Psychiatric Clinic featured elegant wood paneling, chandeliers, and upholstered furniture. Underground corridors connected the otherwise freestanding clinic to the main hospital. Patient units were categorized by level of acuity; hence, as a patient improved he or she would move through the different units until finally being discharged. If improvement was not imminent, patients were transferred to the Bloomingdale Asylum.

A former Bloomingdale physician, George S. Amsden, was ap-

pointed the first psychiatrist-in-chief (1932–1935). In 1936, a protégé of Adolph Meyer, Oskar Diethelm, succeeded Amsden and ran the clinic for the next 26 years. Diethelm was followed by William Lhamon (1962–1974), Robert Michels (1974–1991), William A. Frosch (1991–1993), and Jack D. Barchas, who has been psychiatrist-in-chief since 1993. Under their leadership the Payne Whitney Psychiatric Clinic developed into one of the nation's leading academic psychiatric centers.

In 1993, the Payne Whitney Psychiatric Clinic building was razed to make way for a new New York Hospital. In August 1997, the Payne Whitney Psychiatric Clinic returned from temporary quarters to take up residence in the Greenberg Pavilion of The New York Hospital. Fully integrated into the hospital, the new Payne Whitney Psychiatric Clinic now opens its doors to the acutely mentally ill, much as Samuel Lyon envisioned nearly a century ago.

REFERENCE

1. Russell WL: The New York Hospital: A History of the Psychiatric Service, 1771–1936. New York, Columbia University Press, 1945, pp 471–487

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