

## MEDICINE

# Hospitals Worry Patients

Hospital patients worry almost as much about costs, food, and hospital noises, as they do about the state of their health, but "you only get what you pay for"—By Faye Marley

► NEXT TO WORRY about his health, the average hospital patient is bothered by the cost, noise and food related to his stay in the more than 7,000 institutions in the United States.

The American Hospital Association reports that the average cost for each day a patient spends in one of these hospitals has more than doubled—to \$36.83 a day—in the last ten years.

Steadily rising labor costs, which have increased more than 333% since 1946, and nonlabor costs, which have increased slightly more than 200% in that period, are two of the reasons for the increase.

But the 26.5 million patients who were in American hospitals last year are not so much interested in the fact that the hospitals spent more than \$10 billion to take care of them as in the problem of how they can pay their bills.

This problem worries patients who have a little money in their savings, along with some hospitalization plan, more than it worries the so-called indigent, who somehow manages to be cared for.

Suppose the cost problem is solved, at least for those who spend an average of one week in the hospital. What do these patients get for their money?

"The noise was awful and the food was terrible," too often is the report of those who tell their friends about their operations. In a book called *Noise in Hospitals*, a Hill-Burton publication, patients listed some of the sounds that disturbed most of them: night nurses' coffee breaks; the hard heels of visitors and non-nursing personnel; toilet flushing; telephones ringing; radio and TV sets; floor-polishing machines; slamming of doors and bedpan washers.

Dr. Jack C. Haldeman, Assistant Surgeon General, U. S. Public Health Service, said in the foreword to this 130-page book that it emphasizes practical ways to control noisy situations. Hospital administrators helped the researchers in their study of both mechanical and personal sources of noise.

The increased use of mechanical and electrical equipment and the lighter weight construction materials tend to increase the problem of noise control.

The timing of food service—too early or too late in order to suit the "convenience" of the staff—is as much a reason for complaint as the type and quality of the food.

This is a return to the first of the original three gripes—the cost of hospitalization.

Dr. Jack Masur, director of the Clinical Center of the National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, Md., and a former president of the American Hospital Association, told SCIENCE SERVICE that patients object to the rising cost, but at the same time complain about the service,

"The problem is largely economic," Dr. Masur said. "You can get anything you pay for. But payroll costs account for three-fourths of the rising expense. Hospitals work with two and a half to three shifts of employees on food service, and it is not so much a matter of staff convenience when food is served as it is the practical matter of getting it ready and brought to the patient."

Tests have to be fitted into the schedule of meals also.

The psychology of the sick enters into his attitude toward food, of course, Dr. Masur pointed out. He would complain at home, too.

"I'm sick and I don't want any dinner," is what he would say. "I'm unhappy about being in the hospital," he says or indicates.

The Clinical Center is not typical of the ordinary hospital, Dr. Masur explained. It maintains a large staff for special diets for specific ills of the patients it accepts for treatment, and the hours for meals are quite civilized.

Expansion of hospital services to include community health work for the chronically ill, the aged and others not actually in hospital beds was emphasized at the 65th annual meeting of the American Hospital Association in New York, which some 20,000 hospital representatives attended.

• Science News Letter, 84:151 September 7, 1963

## OPERATIONS RESEARCH

## Hospital Bed Needs Forecast Mathematically

► THE NUMBER of beds and other facilities a hospital will need at any time in the near future can be predicted using a mathematical formula.

The first truly scientific means of solving the problem was developed by two Purdue University industrial engineers, Prof. George W. Brooks and Dr. Henri Beenhakker. By carefully studying the relationship between the surrounding population and the demands for each of the hospital's services, they were able to find the answer for the Community Hospital of Indianapolis.

The formula is based on 29 significant factors, including the age distribution and economic status of the people in the surrounding area as well as internal hospital conditions. It is adaptable for use by hospitals throughout the world.

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## NUTRITION

## Unsalted Food Available For Overweight Nibblers

► IT'S THE SALT, not the snack, that puts pounds on the nibbler who reaches into popcorn or pretzel bowls.

Pretzels are available without surface salt. Popcorn need not be salted, and soda crackers and nuts without salt will not cause excess body fluid that adds weight to the salt eater.

Dr. Garfield G. Duncan of Pennsylvania Hospital, Philadelphia, has found that obese persons have lost as much as ten pounds in one day on salt-free diets.

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Union Carbide

**FIFTEEN ACRES OF PLASTIC**—This hydroelectric reservoir in Costa Rica is being covered with impermeable Krene vinyl liner to reduce danger of bank slippage. The film is covered with three inches of sand and nine inches of dirt to protect it from mechanical damage.