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Cover: Fishermen have long known that practically any object placed on the ocean floor will become a local hangout for fish and other sea life. Here, bottom-dwelling fish in Hawaii make themselves a home in concrete pipes. Researchers in the United States and elsewhere would like to follow the lead of the Japanese by carefully designing artificial reefs to improve the management of fisheries. (Photo: Artificial Reef Development Center, Sport Fishing Institute)



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## Letters

### The patient as prisoner

I agree completely with Bruce Danto's viewpoint of what is happening in our jails ("Bruce Danto and the Crime of Jail Suicide," SN: 6/14/86, p. 380). In 1970, when I first heard of the deinstitutionalization idea, I told several of the enthusiastic supporters of this that it was a snare and a delusion and that the legislatures would not create mental health outpatient facilities, halfway houses and other programs but would merely empty the hospitals and go about their merry way. This is precisely what has happened in Florida.

I frequently evaluate men and women in several jails in the north-central part of Florida. It is my opinion that approximately 50 to 65 percent of the population in the county jails in this particular court district are actually individuals who should be in a locked ward or in a halfway house and under psychiatric and psychological treatment rather than in a county jail.

James R. Fisher  
Clinical and consulting psychologist  
Eustis, Fla.

It was a public service as well as science news for you to publish the feature on Bruce

Danto and jailhouse suicide. However, several corrections are in order. First, while prisons have only a few more suicides per 100,000 than does the population at large, jails have between 10 and 13 times the number of suicides (about 130 per 100,000, compared with 11 per 100,000 in the general population). Thus the problem is even more dire than the article portrays.

Second, while many jail suicides are committed by people charged with nonviolent crimes and who were alcohol- and drug-involved (in fact most are being detained and have not yet been tried or convicted), this profile is meaningless for prediction and prevention purposes since most jail inmates fall into it. A meaningful profile must distinguish between the jail population at large and those who will attempt or actually accomplish their suicide.

Third, the American Association of Correctional Psychology (AACP) is a society of some 350 professionals involved in the treatment of criminal offenders generally, and jail suicides specifically. The AACP welcomes the efforts of the American College of Forensic Psychiatry and the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law and hopes they join us in training line officers.

Fourth, Danto estimates jailed prisoners to be committing suicide "at a rate in excess of a

thousand deaths per year." The Bureau of Criminal Statistics for the U.S. Department of Justice compiled data in June 1983 showing 554 deaths in the nation's 3,338 jails, of which 294 (53 percent) deaths were suicides. These are the most recent census data available known to me. This points up the need for better baseline data. Also, 294 suicides still represent a national tragedy, and Danto's points remain cogent.

Allen K. Hess, President  
American Association  
of Correctional Psychology  
Auburn, Ala.

I read with interest the recent article by Joel Greenberg on the subject of forensic psychiatry. Although the use of psychiatric testimony in the courtroom setting may at times raise serious and difficult questions, it would certainly be unfortunate if this caused highly qualified mental health professionals to steer clear of courtrooms. There are many cases in which psychiatric testimony is essential. Psychiatrists, and the medical profession in general, should therefore recognize that competent testimony by mental health professionals is essential to the effective functioning of our legal system.

Leo Uzych  
Wallingford, Pa.

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