

Horror tales emerge from Australian hospital

SYDNEY (Reuter): In a small Sydney hospital a thin 13-year-old girl suffering from anorexia nervosa — loss of appetite and aversion to food due to an emotional disturbance — lay naked, strapped to a bed.

Just after midnight a doctor entered the ward. Moments later her body, rudely awakened from a drug-induced coma, thrust violently upward as a bolt of electricity surged through it.

It happened 10 times in two weeks — without anaesthetic, without her consent and without the knowledge of her parents.

Eventually she was discharged with brain damage. But she is one of the "lucky" ones — she survived.

This is one of many barbaric tales to emerge from a two-year government investigation into Chelmsford private psychiatric hospital in Sydney.

For more than 10 years psychiatrist Dr Harry Bailey turned Chelmsford into a chamber of horrors. Many patients did not check out alive.

Former nurse Lesley Hosi told the commission Bailey once told staff: "Don't call me Harry, call me God".

"I thought, God, he is mad," she said. "When you work with psychiatrists for that long you sort of get to know the crazy ones."

"He really did believe what he was doing was helping people. It was said."

Bailey treated more than 3,000 patients as guinea pigs for his Deep Sleep Therapy (DST) — barbiturate-induced

By Michael Perry

comas lasting up to three weeks — and Electro-Convulsive Therapy, according to the Royal Commission's report.

Between 1963 and 1979 at least 24 patients died as a result of DST. Another 24 committed suicide after being discharged.

In all, 183 deep sleep patients died either in hospital or within a year of returning to the outside world, while 977 were diagnosed as brain damaged.

Horror

Elaine Gainsborough had four metal plates inserted in her head in 1966. She only discovered this nine years later.

Now she can no longer talk properly. A pin holding one of the plates has slipped out.

Gwen Whitty was 28 when she entered Chelmsford for a few days rest. Eighteen years later an egg-sized lump appeared on the left of her head. Within days metal began to emerge.

One year later an identical lump and piece of metal appeared on the right side of her head.

"We called Dr Bailey 'The Science Professor' because he was experimenting on all of us," said Whitty, now 53.

"We are all damaged — brain damaged" due to what she calls "that little horror hospital".

Some semi-conscious patients agreed to psycho-

surgery, even though they had no history of psychiatric problems.

Many were just suffering from stress or were alcoholics or drug addicts trying to wean themselves off their habit.

Barry Hart a former model and actor walked into Chelmsford in 1973. While waiting to speak to Bailey he was given a glass of water and some tablets to settle his nerves.

"In good faith I took them and that's the last thing I can remember with clarity," Hart told Reuters.

"I woke up two weeks later with double pneumonia, pleurisy, thrombosis, an embolism and...brain damage."

Hart was awarded A\$60,000 dollars (US\$46,000) compensation in 1980, but an appeal against the judgement is still pending. No other patient has received compensation.

Chelmsford is now closed. Bailey killed himself with drugs in 1985.

Suspicion

The horrors of Chelmsford would never have been exposed had it not been for the courage of one person, nurse Rosa Nicholson.

After a friend died following deep sleep treatment, she spent 18 months trying to get a job at Chelmsford. In mid-1977 an advertisement in a Sydney newspaper gave her chance.

For the next two years she smuggled hospital and patient records out of Chelmsford, photocopied and returned them.

She remained undercover for a decade, leaking damaging evidence against Bailey to those who would listen.

Finally in 1988 a royal commission was announced.

Nicholson told the commission deep sleep patients frequently suffered internal bleeding and severe infections. They were given electric shock treatment every day except Sunday.

Staff said Bailey had sex with his female patients, often ordering them sent by taxi to his office or home late at night.

Commissioner Justice John Slattery said in his 12-volume report there were "strong suspicions" that Bailey was involved in the suicide of his patient and lover, singer Sharon Hamilton.

Bailey was the sole beneficiary of Hamilton's will.

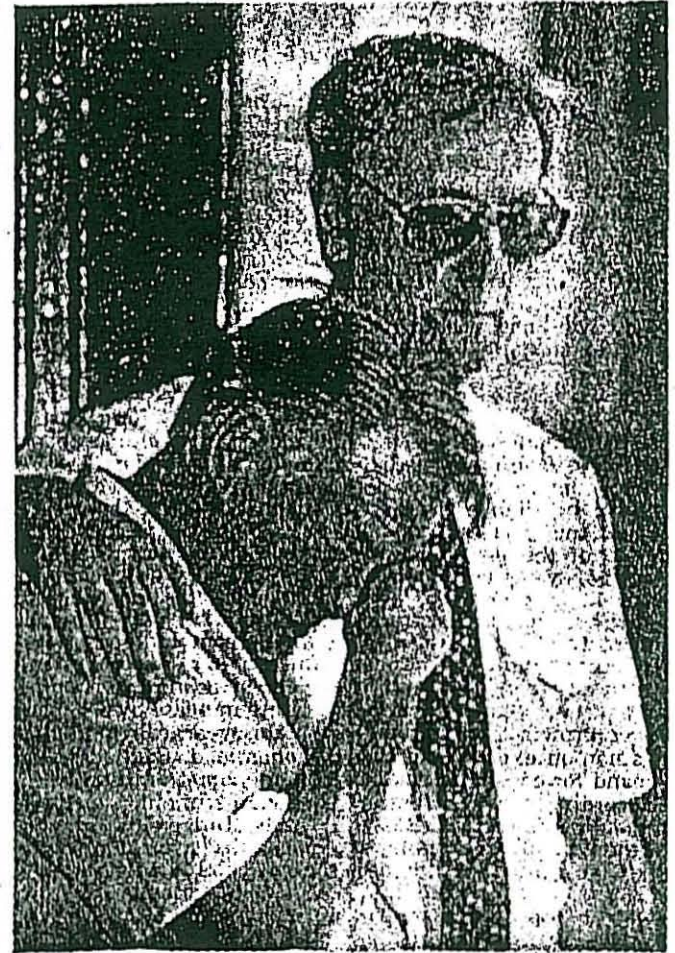
"No one questioned Bailey because he was the leader in his field," Whitty said. "He had all the credentials of an eminent specialist — you couldn't help but believe in him."

It took the setting up of the royal commission for many patients to overcome their shame and testify.

Joyce Fletcher had 29 deep sleep and 10 shock treatments without her consent.

"I don't care now who knows about it, I was very ashamed about it, but I am not any more," she said.

But her four weeks in Chelmsford still cause nightmares. "I am always trying to get out of somewhere. I feel trapped."



Former Chelmsford Hospital psychiatric patients Barry Hart (right) and Richy Lawrence (left) comfort each other on Dec. 20 at the New South Wales Parliament after the release of a government report on Chelmsford, where 24 patients died after undergoing electric shock treatment while in drug-induced comas. (Reuters)