

Transformations: The history of the asylum

THE 20TH and 21ST CENTURIES

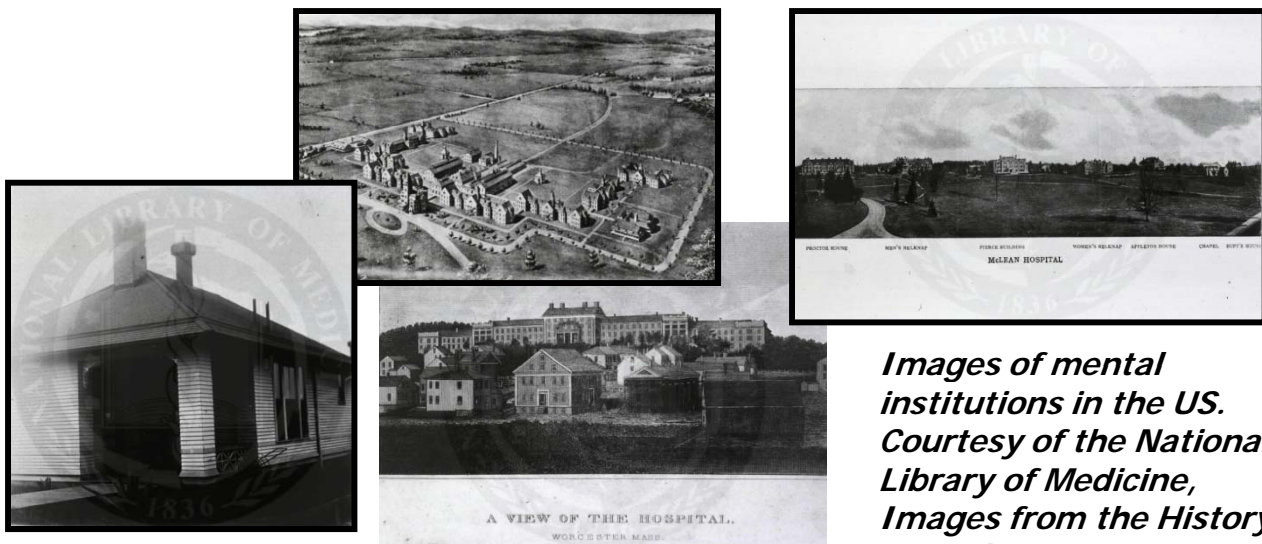
Where are we now?

Beginning in the 1960s, state mental institutions began to close and to release patients- since then, about 90% of the beds in these facilities have been taken away. Much of this effort was due to lack of federal funding for patient care, but it also was driven by reactions to poor conditions within the institutions.

Still, the closures were done relatively quickly, with the pace quickening in the 1990s. While there were reasons for this change- studies showed that a web of community based programs could be as effective and cheaper than maintaining state hospitals- the pace of deinstitutionalization was so fast that it was difficult for community programs to keep pace with needs. Many people were released before comprehensive programs to care for the de-institutionalized were in place. As a result, they were left on the streets without care or oversight.

Since then, there has been a concerted effort to create a strong network of community based programs caring for clients and providing them with opportunities to integrate into society.

Another major effort of groups such as NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) is to reduce the stigma associated with a diagnosis of mental illness.



Images of mental institutions in the US. Courtesy of the National Library of Medicine, Images from the History of Medicine.