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Bringing Back Asylums

My Understandings and views of Asylums

An asylum is a hospital for people who face mental disorders that are either harmful to the people around them or themselves. These mental institutions were created to treat people by giving them shock therapy, medicines, or other types of medications that will stop them from being a threat to themselves or society. Being placed in an institution could be long term or short term depending on how much supervision is needed for the patient. Many mental institutions became abandoned due to mistreatment of patients as well as not having enough money to support them. These institutions needed a lot of money in order to supply the medication, rooms, food, and other necessities to keeping the mental hospital running. I am interested in this topic because I do not believe that bringing mental institutions will stop many people from becoming spree killers. People such as the Parkland or Maryland shooter should not be classified as mentally ill. They realized what they were doing was wrong by bringing an armed weapon to school and used the excuse that their life was hard to kill other people. The institutions back then were similar to jail because they would mistreat people and lock them away. There must have been a reason that they closed down the majority of the institutions. Instead of creating institutions that will not help stop mass killings they should create more jails and prohibit many people of a young age from handling any type of weapons as well as adults. Doing a background check before releasing a dangerous weapon to anyone would also be a great

preventative measure to take. Mental institutions were meant to help people back then but most of them still face a mental disorder today, so how are we certain that bringing back these institutions will make a difference?

The Scavenger Hunt

What made me decide to write about bringing back mental institutions was when I came across an article in New York Times that talked about how President Trump wants to bring back asylums because he believed that it would stop school shootings. Another area that I researched was on the library web page and clicked on resources. Then I clicked on Databases and E-Resources and clicked on the Academic Search Complete. When I first searched my topic most of them were not in the United States and other were not as recent to my topic than I had hoped for. By switching up my key words such as institutions, mental illness and geographic terms it allowed me to find more information on my topic. In order for me to find an interview of introducing mental institutions again I went to Google and typed in recent talks about asylums. I found two interviews with Trump talking about reopening mental institutions and how it had helped people before they were shut down. After struggling to find more articles off of the library catalog, I talked to my professor to see if he was able to help me with some search words. While he was helping me search for more articles, he found search words such as; asylums or mental institutions and United States. I also went to Academic One File to find more documents and in the search box I typed in asylums.

The Major Discovery to the Scavenger Hunt

Overtime many school shootings have occurred at Sandy Hook, Parkland High School and Maryland High School, leaving many family members devastated and asking why did they lose their child. In the article “Trump Wants More Asylums” most psychiatrists and President Trump

believe that the reason they committed these crimes was because they were mentally ill, though some of it is not the case. Articles have shown that most criminals do not have the symptoms to be mentally ill to have caused a spree kill. Although President Trump believes that creating more asylums will stop gun violence most people believe long term treatment will not stop them from doing it again. Jennifer Mathis, the director of the policy and legal advocacy at Bazelon Center states “locking people up long-term is no treatment at all...we did this before, and it failed and failed badly – it’s crazy and discriminating.” Dr. E. Fuller Torrey, founder of the Treatment Advocacy Center favors bringing back asylums. By having asylums, he wants there to be more of an investment for people who are facing severe mental illnesses. He states “No one seemed to care enough a generation ago, when so many become homeless. Now that they’re going to prison, well, there are horrendous tragedies, and if there were beds available, you wonder how many of these tragedies could be avoided.” This made me realize that the reason they shut down mental institutions could have been because not many people cared back then. In the article “Why prisons are not “The New Asylums” states “Once you had hundreds of thousands of people leaving mental hospitals, they suddenly, obviously, didn’t become mentally healthy. They went to the streets, they became homeless, and then they eventually began to cycle into the system that cannot say no.” How do we know that these criminals who are mentally ill will not come out of treatment and repeat the same crime they did before?

What I discovered in the article “Guns, Violence, and Mental Health: Did We Close the State Mental Hospitals Prematurely” was that “with respect to violence towards others 13% of people with a serious mental illness reported having committed assaultive acts during the previous year. The majority of homicides, including those involving firearms, are not committed by persons who are psychotic or suffering from severe psychiatric disorder.” This comes to show

that most people who start a killing spree are not necessarily mentally ill. However, in most cases if they have had a history of being in a mental hospital or having to take medicines could have a connection as to why they did what they did. It also states that “1 in 20 violent crimes were committed by persons who are psychotic or suffering from a severe psychiatric disorder.” The article “Bringing back the asylums? The tragic consequences of deinstitutionalization, Henry A. Nasrallah states “Yesterday’s state hospitals have morphed into today’s jails and prisons. Their illness behaviors have been criminalized and deemed “illegal” because they live in the community not in a medical facility... They are perceived as crime perpetrators.” After seeing these statistics of how many people who are mentally ill commit crimes, creating asylums will be helpful not only to us but to them too.

Another problem that should be addressed is people who have a criminal history should be readdressed to make sure they are not a risk for people around them or themselves. Doing background checks when they are wanting to purchase weapons, making sure they do not have a mental illness and if they do make sure they are being watched so they don’t commit crimes. In the article “An Exploration of Specialty Programs for Inmates with Severe Mental Illness: The United States and The United Kingdom” David C. Kondrat, William S. Rowe and Melanie Sosinski mention how many people who are placed in a prison and face severe mental illness could cause an increase of re-offense, parole violations and re-incarceration. In this article, it states “the increase in the number of persons with severe mental illness in the criminal justice system is a significant problem for policy makers, program developers, and frontline practitioners. Not all persons with severe mental illness who commit crimes do so with nefarious intentions. Criminal activity is directly linked to impacts of mental illness on judgement whereas others enter the criminal justice system as a result of criminalization of their symptoms and lack

of available treatment resources.” People who have committed a severe crime cannot be determined to have a mental illness because of what they did. There has to be more evidence for people to label criminals as mentally ill.

In an interview with President Trump, he talks about how important it is to bring back asylums. He states “in the old days they had mental institutions, hopefully he gets help, but he’s off the streets. You can’t arrest him, I guess, because he has not done anything but you know he’s like a boiler ready to explode, right? But in the old days you could put them in mental institutions but the government closed them because of costs.” This made me realize that having mental institutions could be a better option for the mean time. Even if they did not commit a crime they would still be in a mental institution if they show any signs of danger. Another interview that president Trump had with ABC new talking about the Parkland shooter and how he should have gone to a mental institution. He believes that having asylums could have prevented a tragedy at Parkland High School. He mentions that when a person shows signs of being mentally ill could be brought to a mental institution away from the community.

According the article “From Beauty to despair: The Rise and Fall of American State Mental Hospitals,” they mention how asylums were meant to be safe havens. So, what caused them to close all close down? The issue with institutions is that they are very expensive to maintain and the government sees health at the bottom of their list of issues. In the article it states, “Asylums, from their very beginning, faced pressure to expand... With the increase in the patient population, state legislatures failed to increase funds as well thus increasing the burden of the already underfunded institutions.” This comes to show that if we were to bring back asylums the government will need to increase these institutions funds in order to keep our community safe from people who could cause harm to the community.

As the United States faces many losses in the past months, the thought of bringing back mental institutions could create a drastic change. In the article, “The Modern Asylum” ethicists from the University of Pennsylvania discuss ways that modern asylums are beneficial to the mentally ill. They state, “Modern asylums will be nothing like the one in “One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest.” ... Asylums for the severely mentally disabled would provide stability and structure. Vocational skills would be incorporated when possible and each patient would have responsibilities.”

By researching many articles my views towards asylums has changed and allowed me to realize how effective they could be if President Trump brings them back. Though many changes should be made as to how asylums what treatments are used on patient with a disability. It also comes to show that health should start becoming more important in the United States. If we were to focus more on mental health it could prevent families from losing their love ones as well.

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