

CUMMING

VETERANS' HOSPITAL #57,

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Waukesha, Wisconsin,  
March 17, 1922.

LK/LB

The Surgeon General,  
U. S. Public Health Service,  
Washington, D. C.

Attention General Inspection Service.

Sir:

I have the honor to enclose herewith clippings of articles that appeared in various newspapers since last Saturday, chiefly concerning three alleged deaths in this hospital from the administration of poison. It will be observed that the Commander of the American Legion for the state of Wisconsin asked the Governor to hold an investigation of these deaths, and the Governor requested a coroner of this city to investigate the deaths. Dr. Lorenz, one of the best known pathologists and psychiatrists in the country, and Dr. Guilford of the Wisconsin State Board of Health, were sent here to do an autopsy and report on these cases. This autopsy was also attended by the Clinical Director of this hospital, Dr. Heldt, and myself. The report shows conclusively that there was nothing unusual or extraordinary about these cases. The one patient autopsied showed unmistakable evidence of double bronchial pneumonia and no evidence whatever of poison. Syphilis, for which the patient was being treated, was also plainly evident. The third patient drawn into this investigation had been autopsied by us several weeks before. He had a typical case of general paralysis of the insane and the autopsy findings clearly showed this.

These deaths would ordinarily have caused no comment in any other hospital. The trouble here was that the state Commander of the Legion has prompted patients here through the Legion post in the hospital, to report to him any grievance they have, and he being antagonistic to the Public Health Service grabs at anything they might say in order to cause a disturbance, although he admits that the post in the hospital is a nuisance and says our patients are irresponsible. When this report reached him through the local post he immediately called up the Governor and then gave the information to the associated press that three patients had been poisoned. He announced that he would not have this thing whitewashed and said the Public Health Service whitewashed everything for which they held an investigation. This man professed to think well of the way I have conducted the hospital and wondered how I had done so well with our irresponsible patients. In the next breath he told me I ought to clean out all the help I had here and start over new. Inasmuch as he never visited here but once previously and had received no reports except through

irresponsible patients, it is difficult to understand how he can come to that conclusion. He said that Dr. Heldt, the Clinical Director, had no ability and was of no value to the institution. It was enough for him that some patient had told him this. The mere fact that Dr. Heldt had been offered \$10,000 a year to resign and accept a position elsewhere was not sufficient to change his opinion in the least. The same thing applied to our dietitian whom we think is very efficient. I refused to agree with him on any of these matters or with his idea that the Surgeon General had proved himself to be incompetent because this building has a roof that might burn off and because a certain non-fire proof storehouse near the building had not been moved, as Dr. Barrett had asked in a letter to the Bureau. It does not seem to penetrate this man's mind that even the Government has to have money before they can spend it.

The only newspaper which has assumed a hostile attitude toward the hospital has been the Milwaukee Sentinel. They wrote several articles about the fire traps and the venereal cases here, but discontinued this after their Waukesha reporter had told them that by their course they were injuring their paper in Waukesha. The citizens of Waukesha, including the downtown post of the American Legion in this city, appear unanimously in favor of the institution. We have not heard either directly or indirectly a hostile word from anyone in this vicinity, nor has there been any discontent or hostility among the patients in the hospital, except that which is to be expected from this class of patients, and that which has occasionally been fanned by outside influences.

Dr. Barrett, the State Commander of the American Legion seemed very much disappointed at result of the autopsy and the findings of the inquest. He was disturbed about what his 30,000 Legioners would say when they found there was nothing to his charges.

Respectfully,

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Surgeon In Charge.