

NEWS RELEASE

Canadian Mental Health Association

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

EDMONTON, ALBERTA, MAY 7, 2002 –

“For almost one hundred years, Alberta’s mental health services have been driven by economics, political expediency and sheer raw power.”

In a new book to be released this week, author Ron LaJeunesse claims Alberta’s mental health services have been determined by politics rather than science. Based on King Henry VIII’s Bedlam ‘madhouse,’ Alberta’s system of care has all too frequently been driven by economics, political expediency and sheer raw power.

Written in novel genre but based on fact, this book chronicles the human stories behind the previously sanitized versions of our history from the early 1900s to 2002.

In 1913, Premier Arthur Sifton abandoned a scientific concept of ‘moral treatment’ in favour of large institutions where more than 500 patients were crowded into buildings designed for half that number. The 1930s then saw Health Minister George Hoadley propose sexual sterilization to prevent “weakening of the race by subnormal individuals.” The 1950s saw Premier Ernest Manning’s drive to deinstitutionalization based on economics. For many, the plan failed dismally. The 1970s saw Minister ‘bungling’ Bob Bogle mishandle Premier Lougheed’s commitment to reform, and in the 1990s Health Minister Jonson returned to an eighty-years old approach as he rebuilt an outdated institution in his home constituency.

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In the intervening years patients were crowded into leaking buildings, placed in ‘electric cupboards,’ stored on shelves, strapped in cold water, beaten, experimented upon, sent to jails, sometimes killed and, all too frequently, abandoned to the streets.

Does the new millennium look any more promising? The predictions are guarded.

About the Author

Ron LaJeunesse has thirty years’ experience in mental health service delivery and has a particularly unique vantage point, having worked at the most senior levels within government and in community advocacy initiatives. He is the Executive Director of the Alberta Division of the Canadian Mental Health Association.

The book will be officially launched at a ceremony in the Heritage Room of Edmonton City Hall between 4:00 and 8:00 p.m. on Friday, May 10.

Copies of the book are available at the ‘launch’; from the Resource Centre for Voluntary Organizations in Edmonton (780-497-5616); from Volunteer Calgary (403-231-1446); or from any office of the Canadian Mental Health Association in Alberta.

Interviews with the author may be obtained by calling 780-482-6576.

POLITICAL ASYLUMS

By Ron LaJeunesse
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