

Desperate situation of the patients from the Poiana Mare Hospital

The Southern Paper,

Monday, February 23rd, 2004

The Center for Legal Resources (CLR), a non-governmental organization which acts for the protection of human rights and the promotion of the rule of law, draws through a report the attention to the situation existing at the Psychiatry Hospital Poiana Mare, where 17 patients have died from hunger and cold since the beginning of 2004, and other 84 have deceased from similar causes during the year 2003.

As it was highlighted in CLR's report, the other 440 patients of the hospital face the same danger if they don't receive emergency help in the shape of medicine, food, clothing and heating fuel.



Patients at Poiana Mare Hospital

The patients are underfed

Following the visit at the hospital, one day after the inspection of the Ministry of Health, Georgiana Pascu, Program Manager at CLR, has declared: *"These people aren't provided with means for satisfying their basic needs, they lack adequate medical treatment and primary medical care. The patients are underfed, and in the food supply hall all I found was vegetable hotchpotch. They wear torn pyjama shirts, most of them without trousers or underwear. The cold from the wards damages their health even more, because the hospital is not heated and the temperature outside was, on the evening of February 20th, of minus 7 degrees Celsius."*

At the same time, another case recorded at the Hospital Poiana Mare and qualified as intolerable by the CLR representative is that of a young man with a severe mental handicap (oligophrenia) at the same time suffering from HIV/AIDS, probably in a final phase. The young man had been brought to the hospital in a state of excitement, following a decision issued by the County Authority for the Protection of the Rights of the Child.

Concerning the state of this young man, Georgiana Pascu stated: *"He does not belong here. His health state would call for his transfer to the medical section for <contagious patients> of a hospital, where he can get the specific medication and food he needs. He is very thin, alone, in an unheated room, he could be at any time abused by the other patients"*.

The intolerable situation from The Hospital Poiana Mare has been made public several times during the last years. During the Ceausescu regime, in the '70s and 80s the hospital was known as one of the locations where dissidents were hospitalized and kept against their will. After 1989, the inhuman living conditions and the lack of adequate medical treatment became the symbolic illustration of the tragic situation into which thousands of persons with mental illness find themselves, hospitalized in similar institutions all throughout the country, as the report also shows.

The representatives of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhumane or Degrading Treatments have visited the hospital in 1995 and 1999. The officials of the Ministry of Health would declare back then: *"We will gradually close the Hospital Poiana Mare because it no longer provides for acceptable living conditions"*.

"A declaration never put into practice", declares the CLR representative. The Center for Legal Resources has initiated, together with Amnesty International, a monitoring activity of the way the fundamental rights of adult persons with psychic illnesses and intellectual handicap living in specialized residential institutions are being observed. The right to dignity and respect for the person as a human being, the right to physical and mental integrity, to the security of one's own person and to

the protection of one's health are rights which do not cease beyond the gates of the institutions, states the CLR manager.

AIDS patient dead in a psychiatric institution

Simona Popa

Evenimentul Zilei,

Friday, February, 27th 2004

An outrageous case is being monitored by the Center for Legal Resources, a non-governmental organization which accuses the Ministry of Health for the disaster found in the Hospital Poiana Mare - Dolj county.

The Ministry of Health (MS) should have been long time ago aware of the problems in the Psychiatry Hospital Poiana Mare, which is one of the eight maximum security hospitals in the country. The representatives of the Center for Legal Resources (CLR), who have visited the hospital immediately after the scandal of the patients dead of cold and hunger burst in the press, sustain that the guilt for what happened does not belong uniquely to the institution's management.

"Eight months ago, when it became a maximum security hospital, it also became a national interest objective. According to the law, the hospital is directly subordinated to the Ministry of Health. Therefore, the people from the Ministry of Health should have known long ago what is going on there", Georgiana Pascu, Program Manager at CLR has declared. Just like Amnesty International and the National Association of the Persons Ensured and of Patients with Social Health Insurances (ANAPASS), the people from CLR had an immediate reaction once the story of the victims from Poiana Mare appeared in press.

CLR has visited the psychiatry hospital one day after the first control of the MH and found there hungry and poorly dressed patients hospitalized in unheated wards. The Center informed the press on what they saw, the journalists published it and thus the story got to the attention of the European officials.

The problem of the Minister of Health, Ovidiu Branzan, expressed on Wednesday, at the end of the visit was not connected to the fate of the patients, but to the fact that the NGOs had made The European Institutions aware of the disaster found at Poiana Mare. *"I understood that certain NGOs, preoccupied with the fate of these patients, reported the situation to foreign institutions. Well, if they were so preoccupied with the fate of the patients, they should have come directly to me, and not go to tell on us",* Minister Branzan declared on Wednesday.



The Minister of Health, Ovidiu Branzan, trying to explain the situation in Psychiatric Hospitals in Romania: "I find difficult to believe the words of people without discernment"

Georgiana Pascu explained that the Center for Legal Resources did send to Minister Branzan a report on what they saw: "We did try to contact him. We made a report and we send it to him. We received no answer, but I think he didn't have the necessary time, since only four days had passed. We did not inform any European Institutions, I think they took notice on their own". Commenting upon the enthusiastic conclusions of the Minister after his visit to Poiana Mare, the CLR representatives tell us how they acted: *"We did not go there on an announced visit. The Minister of Health saw what he saw after a whole hospital had cleaned up. What we don't understand is connected to the fact that we were expecting a different reaction from an authority"*

they would have the money needed to hire more qualified personnel. I wish he had said <there is a problem, let's see how we can solve it>", Georgiana Pascu declared.

CLR will monitor a particular case, located, again at Poiana Mare. It's the case of Valentin C., 17 years old, who has died a few days ago in the hospital because of AIDS. The CLR representatives had found the young man at the end of last week in one of the rooms of the psychiatry hospital. He was in a final phase of the illness and also suffering from oligophrenia. *"His health condition would call for a medical transfer to a hospital with a section for <contagious diseases> where he can get the specific medication and food he needs. He is very thin, sitting alone in an unheated room and he could be at any moment abused by the other patients"* Georgiana Pascu says. CLR will notify all the competent authorities in order to find out how the young man with AIDS got there and to what extent the hospitalization conditions from Poiana Mare rushed his end. *"The hospital management is now waiting for someone to come and pick him up from the morgue. Who, I don't know. We are now writing to the authority for Child Protection and to that for the persons with disabilities asking them to order an investigation and find out how it was possible that such a young man got there and why other young persons with a mental disability are being hospitalized in institutions for psychic illnesses"* Georgiana Pascu added.

Poiana Mare Concentration Camp.

Another 440 patients on the brink of death

Romania Libera,

Monday, February 23rd 2004, News Falsh



Patients from Poiana Mare Hospital, on their way to the dinning room

A person with HIV/AIDS - with no food medicines or heat

The Center for Legal Resources, a non-governmental organization, which acts for the protection of human rights and promotes the rule of law makes an urgent appeal to the Romanian authorities to remedy the tragic situation in the Psychiatry Hospital Poiana Mare, where 17 persons have died because of cold and hunger since the beginning of 2004, and other 84 have deceased out of similar causes throughout 2003. At present, another 440 patients of the Hospital find themselves in danger of sharing the same fate if they don't receive emergency help in the form of medicines, food, clothing and heating fuel.

Following the visit to the hospital, one day after the inspection of the representatives of the Ministry of Health, Georgiana Pascu, program manager at the Center for Legal resources, declared: *"These people are not provided even for their basic needs. They lack adequate medical treatment and basic medical care, which they so much need. The patients are underfed, and in the food supply storehouse, all I saw was vegetable hotchpotch cans. They are wearing torn pyjama shirts, most of them without any trousers or under-ware. The cold from the wards makes their health condition even worse, because the hospital is not heated and the temperature outside was on the evening of February 20th of - 7 degrees"*.

Another intolerable situation identified in the hospital is the presence, in one of the wards, of a young man with an advanced mental disability (oligophrenia) also having HIV/AIDS. His health condition is now extremely severe, as he probably finds himself in a final phase of the illness. The young man was brought to the hospital in a state of physical excitement, following a decision from the County Authority for the Protection of Child Rights Dolj. *"His health condition would call for a medical transfer to a medical institution where he can get the specific medication and food he needs. He is very thin, sitting alone in an unheated room and he could be at any moment abused by the other patients"*, Georgiana Pascu said.

Representatives of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and of Inhuman or Degrading Treatments visited the hospital in 1995 and 1999. The officials of the Ministry of Health

would declare back then: “*We will gradually close the Hospital Poiana Mare, because it no longer provides acceptable living conditions...*” A declaration never put into practice.

The hospital of terror from Techirghiol

Maria Petrean

Thursday, March 11th 2004

In the place ceremoniously named “Recovering Center”, the patients live as if in a communist gulag.

On the outskirts of the town of Techirghiol, behind the spa sanatorium, one can find the The Recovering Center for people with chronicle psychic problems. In the three pavilions of an old building live 300 patients who have been brought in 1991 and who had been hospitalized, until then, either in the psychiatry section of the Constanta hospital, or in other external hospital sections in the county. There are in Techirghiol patients who have been abandoned by their families, ill patients who haven't got out of the sanatorium yard in the last 10 years. Others hope that one day, they might return to the usual way of life they used to know before. But they all bear the same label - chronically ill. But the way they are being treated is inhuman.

As soon as you enter the hospital, the first thing you see is a wretched building with almost rotten curtains, with old and destroyed furniture, where the director's office resembles more the door keeper's lodge. The doctor Epaminondas Balinisteanu, has been running the center for some years now, the patients have come to trust him and they approach him whenever they get the chance. He cannot solve their problems because they want warm rooms, they want a bed for each of them, they want more food, and from the director's chair all these seem impossible things to achieve. With the help of a Dutch foundation, one of the center's pavilions has been renovated, new beds and sheets have been bought, but they are not enough and only the patients who can control their physiological reactions are being hospitalized there. Most of the patients live crammed in two damp buildings where the heavy smell has for long entered the walls.



A patient in the Techirghiol Hospital

375 people on 300 places

The Recovering Center was at first designed for 300 patients, but every year other patients came, the old ones have been forgotten by their relatives, and now they are 375 hospitalized. In rooms of three, four beds were crammed, in those of four, five, and so on. But this was not a solution for all of them, and some of the patients lay two in a bed. In the two old pavilions, where the walls have not been painted for over 14 years, the living conditions are inhumane. In small rooms, not even three meters wide, there can be found more beds, the walls are damp, the windows can't be closed, the sheets are torn and dirty (meanwhile some of the washing machines received as a donation from the Dutch stopped functioning), and in the rooms, the patients hung ropes, where they dry their clothes.

The hospital in Turceni, the death cave

Alin Ion

Monday, March 15th 2004

At the psychiatry section of the hospital in Turceni there are currently 87 patients, hospitalized with various neurological problems. For most of them, the hospital stands for home since they have been hospitalized for several years, and some even for decades, and the curing of their afflictions is impossible. But the psychiatry section is also the place from where one can depart for the other world. From the beginning of this year until now, six patients have died, while during the whole of last year, only eight have died. What is particularly curious is the fact that only one person from the 6 deceased during this year was over a certain age, the rest having an age between 47 and 61. (...)



Patients having lunch in Turceni Hospital

Margarine, a delicacy for the patients

The psychiatry section is truly like a prison, all doors being locked, and the windows having bars. The building is very old and decrepit, with the outer walls starting to peel. On the inside, the air is impossible to breathe, and the mattresses are torn and dirty. In between the bars, the patients would shout: *"We want no more rice and potatoes. We're sick of it."* According to the head nurse, Maria Manoiu, the patients have not received any meat since Christmas dinner. And even then, each employee of the hospital had contributed with the 10th part of the 13th salary, in order to buy some meat for the patients. *"Before Christmas, the patients hadn't eaten any meat since summer"*, says the doctor Cornelia Serbanescu. Maria

Manoiu is glad because she can say that starting with a few weeks ago, when a commission headed by the governor of Gorj county, Toni Grebla, came, the menu of the patients became more diversified. *"Now they also get margarine in the morning. What did they get until now? Only bread and tea. As far as the meat is concerned, they don't get any now either."* One month ago, the ex-director of the hospital from Turceni, Andrea Balasa, has resigned because of the insufficient allocated funds, only 5, 217 lei per each patient for the daily nutrition needs: *"I did not want to sign the frame-contract with the Health Insurance House Gorj, because I wanted to avoid being part of a second Poiana Mare case."* Ana Baleanu says that she will appeal to the army stocks, in order to improve the conditions from the hospital: *"The army has stocks in their reserves, we've located a few objects which we could obtain from them: bed sheets, beds, mattresses. We have sent a list with our needs and we're waiting to see what they can do for us."*

CONTROL: An inter-ministerial team checked the situation of several psychiatry units. Ill and healthy people are being hospitalized all of a heap

Adi Sava

Cotidianul

Friday April 2nd 2004

The medical authorities have finally admitted that the Psychiatry Hospital from Poiana Mare is being confronted with severe poverty and dire needs, in what concerns both the medical staff and the provision of appropriate medical assistance, after the representatives of the Ministry had claimed that bad management accounted for the disastrous situation found here. According to the results of the controls conducted by an inter-ministerial team in six psychiatry hospitals, it has been discovered that

in this sanitary units one can find not just psychiatric cases, but also socio-medical cases, which should not be in a hospital of this type. More than that, there have been discovered cases of patients who didn't even fit in this last category of persons needing socio-medical assistance. "From the statements of the staff in Poiana Mare, there are patients who do not fulfill the conditions for being included in the socio-medical category; they have a family, a pension for infirmity or handicap, which is being taken by the family. Their proportion is around 25%", showed the report on the results of the control. The report also highlighted that the same situation can be found in the rest of the units, but in a lower percentage.

An inter-ministry commission, made of representatives of the Ministry of Health, of the Public Prosecutor's Office of the High Court of Cassation and the Ministry of Justice, has checked, during the period 15-31 of March, the safety measures provided for by the law in the psychiatry hospitals from Poiana Mare, Stei, Sapoca, Zam, Padureni-Grajduri and Jebel. The subject of the control had been the recommendation of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and focused on the general characteristics of the units, structures and the types of patients hospitalized, hospitalization conditions, medical treatment and other ways of treatment, and also possible abuses on the patients and some aspects regarding the financing of hospitals. Aurel Nichita, State secretary in the Ministry of health has yesterday made public the fact that, following the controls, the representatives of the Ministry of Health have drawn up a plan for measures of redressing the activity inside The Psychiatry Hospital from Poiana Mare. Nechita has made it clear that in the unit in question there are around 500 people hospitalized, but less than half of them on legal grounds.

In these circumstances, the MH team has asked for an assessment of the health condition of all the hospitalized patients. Even more, it has asked that Section V (socio-medical) be closed and that the patients be redistributed to other specialized departments from Dolj county. The reassessment of the patients will be done twice a year, in order to monitor, from a medical point of view the psychic situation of the patients (a therapeutic evaluation). More than that, the patients who do not show any psychic disorder needing long term hospitalization, will be hospitalized in other medical units.

At the hospital in Mocrea: poverty, madness and illness

Madiana Popescu, Florin Ghilinta

Adevarul, Arad edition

Saturday 31st of January 2004

A life quite apart, an imaginary life barely connected to reality through a shaky bridge. A life where happiness means stroking a cat, receiving a cigarette or a piece of bread.

That's all the happiness these people more numerous every year get, more numerous but always forgotten by authorities when they distribute the funds... Unfortunately, buying that loaf of bread for which those over sixty patients yearn for is a real effort for the managers of the Psychiatry Hospital from Mocrea. And this happens not because they wouldn't want to but because there is no money.

Sadness both inside and outside.

The cold and the bad weather rendered even sadder the park surrounding the old castle from the neighborhood of the village Mocrea, which has become for over sixty years now a psychiatry hospital. Old trees, covered with snow, heaps of brushwood and not a soul around... In this landscape, one can find the old but still imposing castle in which, every year, over 450 people seek tranquility.

Once full of stateliness, the building has long ago lost it, now fallen into decrepitude, all it can do is to announce you already from the gates, that beyond its walls life is just as "tasteless". In front of the hospital, there was a man on a time decayed wooden bench. I supposed he had to be an employee and we were heading to ask him for some information. But, when approaching him, he welcomed us with a "grin" and a strange look. He shows us his tongue he smokes further from a cigarette after which he ignores us.

A cigarette and a piece of bread... happiness.

We entered. A huge, cold hall with high, deteriorated windows with rusty bars without casement bolts, walls without paint, cement on the floor, flooded sinks... a hateful atmosphere. The ward, the same: dark rooms, with three six or eight old, iron, time forgotten beds with the walls painted with food remains in moments of delirium, stoves with detached tiles, attached to one another with clay, a choking smell of cigarette and chlorine... On the ground floor are the men and at the first floor the women. People of all ages, from 18 to 88 years old. Fat or thin, with blond or dark hair they are now all the same. They stay in their beds with the legs and fists closely tight to their chests, smoking or trying to warm their bodies under the counterpanes. They are people who have suffered depressions because of financial or sentimental problems; homeless, some even intellectuals, but most of them abandoned by their loved ones. They now live their lives in a world of their own. They don't seem to be bothered either by the cold from the wards or by the old clothes they are wearing, or by the fact that they haven't had a bath since God knows when... Nothing interests them! A cigarette, a loaf of bread, maybe a calming injection and all is "well"... When I entered one of the wards, a woman, around 40 years old, dressed in a night gown open in the region of her chest - although the cold could freeze your bones, came to us with her hands towards the agenda I was holding in my hands, where it could be seen. "Is it a Bible? I want it too!" She didn't wait for an answer and she just suddenly changed the subject, showing me this time a cat, one of the animals the patients bring to their wards. "I want a picture with the kitty. How happy it will be! I also want with chocolate!" Another lady, around 60, was watching us. I asked her whether she wanted a picture as well. Before, she used to be a nurse. "Oh dear, but I can't have my picture taken. I am not at all fit", she said. Finally she accepted, but only for the cat. Lice, contagious diseases and...pregnancies.

In another bed, covered with several blankets there was a young lady. Homeless, she had got to hospital around three weeks ago. She comes and she goes. This time she didn't come empty-handed. She also brought the medical staff here a...pregnancy! There are other clients of the hospital. They come, they spend a few weeks and they leave. Of course, they cannot be kept here all their lives, although there are cases of hospitalization for over 25 years. The problem is that when they come back from their "trips", they also bring lice or God knows what other contagious diseases from the street or the sewers. The disinfection solutions are expensive, or even if they exist, the patients don't accept getting cleaned up...

In another ward, Tatiana, a woman of 45 years old, was sitting quietly in a window bed. This ward was warmer than the previous ones. Tatiana used to be an economist, she lost everything she had gathered during all her life, and... she went mad...She has a daughter in Canada who cannot help her because her financial situation is not good either. She sends her a letter from once in a while and that's all. Among so many suffering people I found a case apart. He is not psychically ill but he is not however any happier than his colleagues. On the contrary! Gheorghe Latean 43 years of age, finished "Ioan Slavici" high-school and the marine school in Constanta. Now he is here! He has been hospitalized in Mocrea for years, after trying to end his life several times by poisoning, because he has caught his wife cheating on him. Three years ago he had an accident which left him with only one nostril, one eye and half of the face destroyed. He hasn't seen his boy since 1998, but he doesn't want to meet him either. "Why should he see the state in which I have come to be? It is better for him not to know me", Gheorghe Latean tells us, at peace with his fate.

These are only a few of the stories of the people looking for their tranquility in Mocrea. It seems however that they no longer mean anything either for their loved ones, or for those who hold the power and the money into their hands. With all the possible good intentions, the management of the institution cannot do anymore for them. The medicine supply is being purchased on loan. It is the same with the food. Needless to talk about the fuel necessary for heating... This is the most painful side of the story. "We were lucky that the county governor stepped in and got us some fire wood but this is not a solution. We receive some once in a while, other times we cut some from the park surrounding the hospital. We have become beggars! What can we do? This is the situation. It is not good but we manage to survive. This month we have received 400 million lei. Still it is something; we will close the contract with the Health Insurance House. We managed to pay off at least some of the debts. The truth is that last year the situation was extremely difficult. We have received 1,2 billion lei for the yearly expenses, while the necessary rises up to over four billion", states doctor Antoniu Borzac, the director of the Mocrea hospital. The restructuring of the sanitary system and a much too limited budget makes it impossible to hire more staff. Three doctors, 12 nurses and 31 hospital attendants.. an insufficient number for the patients with such special needs. More than that, at present the hospital has in its staff

only one psychiatrist. If the patients suffer from other types of medical afflictions, they must be sent for treatment in other sanitary units in the county. On the other hand, caring for the patients abandoned by their families and with no other income, falls again on the shoulders of the medical staff.

This is the reality in which those who live outside of what we call...life, live. Unfortunately, as we have previously recalled, those who should and could take care of these people's misfortunate fate, simply ignore them..

The Association of the Ensured Persons and of Patients launches unprecedented accusations: The Genocide from Poiana Mare

Simona Popa

Evenimentul Zilei

Monday, February 23rd 2004

A person with oligophrenia and with HIV/AIDS lives in the hospital

During a visit at the Hospital Poiana Mare, the representatives of the Center for Legal Resources (CLR) have found in one of the hospital wards a young man with HIV/AIDS also suffering from oligophrenia, as stated in a press statement issued to the Agency Mediafax by CLR. Georgiana Pascu, program manager at CLR, sustains that the health condition of the young man is extremely serious and that he should be transferred to a section for contagious diseases of another hospital. *"The young man was brought to the hospital in a state of physical excitement, following a decision from the County Authority for the Protection of Child Rights Dolj. He is very thin, alone in an unheated room and he could be at any moment abused by the other patients,"* says Georgiana Pascu. CLR draws the attention upon the fact that those over 400 patients of the Hospital Poiana Mare can also die if they don't get emergency help. *"Through the life conditions and treatment to which the patients are submitted, Romania breaches the International Pact for Civil and Political Rights and the European Convention for Human rights, which prohibit torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatments",* the report also shows. Following the visit to the hospital - one day after the visit of the representatives of the Ministry of Health - Georgiana Pascu found that: *"The patients are underfed, and in the food supply storehouse, all I saw was vegetable hotchpotch cans. They are wearing torn pyjama shirts, most of them without any trousers or under-ware. The cold from the wards makes their health condition even worse, because the hospital is not heated and the temperature outside was of - 7 degrees"* the report also states.