

1 March 1974

MEMORANDUM

To: Marvin Kuschner, M.D., Dean, School of Medicine
From: Max Fink, M.D., Professor of Psychiatry
Subject: VAH Northport

In your discussions with the faculty of the Department of Psychiatry some weeks ago, you highlighted the importance of the facilities at VAH Northport and our relationship to that hospital for the development of this school.

The following capsular history may be helpful in your continuing negotiations with that institution.

In the spring of 1972, Dr. Yolles and I obtained support from the VA Central Office for the establishment of a drug dependence treatment center. Like Venus rising from the sea, the unit was established on July 1, 1972. By October, 1972, the ward was staffed; methadone maintenance, narcotic antagonists, and detoxification for opiate dependence were all provided by a staff that had been well trained; and additional funds had been awarded by NIMH for these programs.

By the summer of 1973, Ward 64B had been renovated and a fine facility established.

During that same summer, we noted that the number of opiate-dependent subjects in the community had been reduced (part of a national phenomenon), and we discussed with Dr. LaCerva the admission of patients with alcoholism in that unit. Approval was granted, and since September 1973, we have run a census of 75% alcohol abuse patients and 25% opiate-dependent.

1 March 1974

Last July, we became participants in the national VAH Collaborative Study of Levomethadyl and Methadone.

This program has continued to develop until Wednesday, February 27, when Dr. Brissenden and I were peremptorily notified by the new medical director that the funding for this unit would terminate on June 30, 1974, and that we should act accordingly.

After considerable discussion with the new medical director, I believe that we were able to convince him that, although the discontinuation of this unit is feasible and can be accomplished readily, a two-year investment giving life to it was worthy of some discussion. He agreed and suggested that he would review the programs in Washington.

I would like to indicate that we went through a similar crisis in the curtailment of funds in 1973, and we were able to intervene in Washington to our satisfaction.

In our discussions some weeks ago, you asked for any information which might enhance our relationships with the VA. These events have been distressing, to say the least, and while maintenance of this unit for some additional months is highly likely, I wonder if this capsular history does not reflect the lack of a significant partnership between the VAH and the Medical School. If Northport is indeed a Dean's Hospital, should not the creation or destruction of programs be a matter of concern to the Dean? Is it proper, in your conception, for programs to be amputated without discussion of their significance to the teaching and research programs, as well as the treatment of patients?

Fortunately, Dr. Yolles anticipated the sequence of events and has provided the Department with alternate teaching and research facilities at another institution. Perhaps you will understand now why this faculty encouraged this relationship and will continue to do so until better faith is shown by the VAH Northport.

MF/cis