

# Rest and Restitution: Convalescence and the Public Mental Hospital in England 1919–39



Wellcome Images

**‘The hurrying of a patient into a world of work and worry... is frequently to precipitate disaster’**  
(Mental After-Care Association, 1938)



The recovering mental patient has historically occupied an uncertain place between institutionalisation and social restitution. Convalescence offered one therapeutic strategy in the early twentieth century to address an ongoing problem of dispossession and the dangers of relapse in recovering mental patients.

My thesis explores why convalescence became the target for particular official, public, voluntary and psychiatric attention between the wars. I argue that convalescence formed part of a professional response amongst psychiatrists and central government to address the low status of mental hospitals, and to bolster claims these formed part of a broader movement of mental hygiene and early treatment.

At the same time, I investigate competing social interpretations of convalescence, including by patients themselves, which interpreted convalescence as a holiday and a normal break from social pressures.