

Shortly after graduating college with a psych degree, I got a job working at a mental hospital. The place looked like an asylum from a scary movie. The facility was 200 hundred years old, with gothic architecture composed of dark brick.

Image of Mental Hospital



http://farm9.staticflickr.com/8433/7709369782_cfb94c7b04_z.jpg

The main hall even had a small museum with relics from the past, like cribs with locks on them

Image of crib



<http://media2.handmadecharlotte.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/bad-crib.jpg>

and newspaper clippings from the 1920's touting Insulin Shock Therapy as the latest cutting edge in treatment

Image of Insulin Shock Therapy paper



<http://586c40.medialib.glogster.com/thumbnails/fc858034eb584effd521bcea4aa4a1861c13472787f979331e9a1405644e00a8/insulin-shock-therapy-source.jpg>

Most of the patients were not dangerous, in fact most of them were very pleasant and friendly.

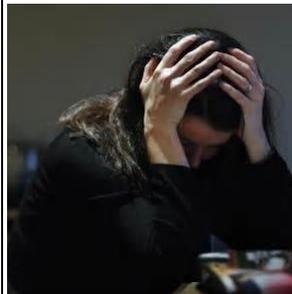
Images of mental patients



http://www.mentalhealthy.co.uk/sites/default/files/bigstock_Home_Nursing_-_Taking_Medicine_8317888.jpg

But close quarters can be stressful

Image of stressed Patient



http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/files/2012/10/mental-health-460_1013135c.jpg

Despite being relatively new, I was assigned to conduct daily interviews with certain patients. The interviews were done one-on-one in a small private room.

Image of room



<http://wozniakintanzania.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/hospital-room.jpg>

The room had a two way mirror so security of patients and staff could be unobtrusively monitored. I was never sure if there was anyone was ever on the other side of the mirror.

Image of 2 way mirror



<http://images.glassinchina.com/ProductImage/20103/p2010-3-27-11-14-28.JPG>

<p>The interview procedure was simple. I got a patient from the common room and brought them to the private room to be interviewed. I had a sheet paper with questions to ask.</p>	<p>Image of common room</p> 
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<p>I wrote down the patient's response then hand the interview paper into the nurses' station.</p>	<p>Image of Nurses' station</p>  <p>http://csbj.com/files/2013/08/memorial-hospital-emergencyroom.jpg</p>
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<p>I was only to ask the questions on form. I was not to say anything else or engage in any type of conversation. There was even a reminder at the top of the paper not to deviate from what was written.</p>	<p>Image of words in bold:</p> <p>DO NOT SAY ANYTHING ELSE TO THE PATIENTS</p>
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<p>The first few dozen times everything went fine. I asked questions; wrote down answers; the patients didn't say much else, and I knew the procedure. "Did anyone visit you yesterday?" Until now, everyone had just said no. But today, a patient, we'll call him Joey, said, "Yes." There was a follow-up question on the paper, "If so, who?"</p>	<p>Image of Man being interviewed</p>  <p>http://www.minddisorders.com/images/gemd_02_img0085.jpg</p>
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<p>"My Mama," Joey replied.</p>	<p>Image of Interview Sheet with Mama written under question</p>
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<p>"That must have been nice." That wasn't on the</p>	<p>Image of the words: THAT MUST HAVE BEEN NICE</p>
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<p>paper. But I had said it, a polite conversational reflex, without thinking.</p>	<p>Quickly followed by the words: DO NOT SAY ANYTHING ELSE TO THE PATIENTS</p>
<p>Joey's face morphed from peaceful to angry. At what I assume was the full volume of his voice he screamed, "It wasn't, I hate that bitch. She comes in here and touches me and has sex with the doctors." This tirade of the filthy acts his mother had committed while visiting continued for what seemed like hours.</p>	<p>Image of Angry Patient  http://trimadnessblog.files.wordpress.com/2012/01/angry-man-yelling.jpg</p>
<p>I thought the screaming would alert someone, a team of nurses with anti-psychotics and sedatives hopefully for both of us, perhaps. But no one came into the room.</p>	<p>Image of Haldol ad:  http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-OIKbr9NYT81/UI03PjZa5I/AAAAAAAAANU8/tUQsmcesC3A/s400/haldol-ad.jpg</p>
<p>A screaming patient in a mental hospital doesn't cause the alarm you think it would.</p>	<p>Image of screaming man  http://www.businesspundit.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/06/angry.jpg</p>

<p>I sat there; looking around; helpless. Having gone off script once and having it blow up in my face made me leery say something else.</p>	<p>Image of someone confused and thinking:</p>
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<p>My instincts told me I should talk to him, try to calmly reassure and sooth him. There had to be some combination words that would miraculously shut this down. I tried to think through every class and experience I'd had, but nothing was coming to mind.</p>	 <p>http://proextend.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/confused_man.jpg</p>
<p>The top of the interview paper said reiterated, "Don't say anything not listed here." Based on what was happening, that seemed like good advice.</p>	<p>Image of Interview Sheet</p> <p>and the words: DO NOT SAY ANYTHING ELSE TO THE PATIENTS</p>
<p>After what seemed like a very long time, Joey paused from screaming about his mother her sexual relations with the doctors, patients, nurses, guards and their pets, long enough for me to ask the next question.</p>	<p>Image of calm man</p>  <p>http://thumbs.dreamstime.com/x/portrait-handsome-calm-bearded-man-23861206.jpg</p>
<p>"What is your goal for today?" My ears were ringing so badly I couldn't hear myself ask the question. As though the last few minutes had never happened, Joey says, "To stay calm." I was amazed he still had a voice after screaming for so many hours. I wrote this down and look at what's next on the paper. "Thank you. You can return to the common room." Joey left the room.</p>	<p>Image of the interview</p>  <p>http://www.minddisorders.com/images/gemd_02_img0085.jpg</p>
<p>What the hell just happened? I laid my head on the table for a moment; my heart was beating at a speed I didn't know it could achieve while sitting still. I knew I needed to</p>	<p>Image of person looking stressed</p>

get the next patient, but I needed a moment to decompress.



<http://static.guim.co.uk/sys-images/Guardian/About/General/2011/9/29/1317312245467/work-desk-stress-illness-007.jpg>

“His mother’s been dead since he was five,” a voice at the door said. The doctor entered the room and closed the door. “That outburst was only about a minute, he’s had them last for hours. He’s loud but so far he’s never been physically aggressive.”

Image of a person standing in a doorway



<http://www.channelweb.co.uk/IMG/595/227595/shadow-in-doorway.jpg>

My first thought was, *Apparently somebody had been behind the mirror.*

Image of person behind mirror



<http://lh5.ggpht.com/v4vblog/SPp14W-BtFI/AAAAAAAAABkU/f5ZBEVC9nnk/s800/two-way-mirror.jpg>

My second thought was, *How the hell had that only been a minute?*

Image of stop watch



http://blog.timesunion.com/opinion/files/2011/02/0301_WViraqWait.jpg

Feeling embarrassed and unprofessional, I tried to compose myself. The doctor, seeming to understand my current state, dismissed my concerns with a wave of his hand. “The reason we ask the question about visitors is to assess for psychotic episodes. I’d say Joey had one. But we also don’t ask follow-up questions to avoid what just happened.”

Image of friendly looking Doctor



<http://recoveryprincess.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/doctor.jpg>

“The important thing,” the doctor said calmly, “is you stayed calm, at least outwardly and didn’t make the situation worse. There aren’t too many people that can do that, my colleagues included. I hope you plan on being here for a while.”

Image of Keep Calm poster



<http://www.eddison-media.com/keepcalmandcarryon/>

I absolutely did not plan on being here longer than I had to. Though the doctor’s words made me feel better and gave me confidence, I knew this was a place I didn’t want to be for very long.

Image of mental Hospital



<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~circuitcourtreords/fgr4/bolivarstatehospital.jpg>