Generally it is taken for granted that there are indeed too many long-stay patients in the mental hospitals and everything possible should be done to reduce their numbers.

On the basis of this thinking, many countries, including the Netherlands, started a more or less fundamental restructuring process of the mental hospitals.

After everything has been said and done the mental hospitals will be able to treat 15000 patients. At the moment there are about 22000 patients in the mental hospitals.

This policy makes it imperative to take an extreme interest in the problems concerning the long-stay patients. One of the most important questions being, whether the number of long-stay patients in the hospitals will increase or decrease in the future.

In this paper data will be used, derived from the central case register for mental patients in the hospitals.

It's important to note that the capacity of mental hospitals is mainly influenced by changes in mental health care outside the hospitals. In other words the capacity depends on other mental health provisions suitable for the chronic psychiatric patients.

For example: the number of oligophrenics in the mental hospitals in 1980 was reduced to one third of the numbers in 1970, while the therapeutic results haven't changed much.
The only explanation for this is the building of more special institutions for the oligophrenics.

Old long-stay patients are usually described as psychiatric patients who have been treated continuously in the mental hospital for a given period of time and longer. Usually the period of time chosen is two years. Personally I prefer a period of three years, because a small but substantial number of patients is discharged between two and three years.

In 1980 the Dutch mental hospitals counted 21,254 beds.
In the same year 18,558 patients had been discharged.
90.2 % left within one year.
5.8 % left within one and two years.
1.5 % left within two and three years.
0.6 % left within three and four years.

Of the 21,254 patients at the end of 1980, 53.4 % belonged to the old long-stay population with a length of stay longer than three years.

43.8 % of the old long-stay patients is 65 years of age or older.
30.3 % of all patients in the mental hospitals at the end of 1980 had been staying there for 15 years or longer.

Every year a number of old long-stay patients leave the mental hospitals in one way or another.
- 1098 long-stay patients, that is 8.8 % of the long-stay population left in 1980
- 633 deceased
- 251 were transferred to other mental health institutions
- 214 left for home or family.
The old long-stay population can be considered as a system. Yearly a number of patients leaves this system. In this way beds for new long-stay patients become available.
In the present situation a little more than 1000 patients can be absorbed yearly in the long-stay sector without causing the mental hospital to grow.

An old long-stay patient has an average length of stay of 11.5 years. Also more than 50 % of the mental hospital patients belong to the old long-stay population. So it stands to reason that a considerable yearly reduction in the number of new long-stay patients is of great significance in reducing the capacity of the mental hospitals.

For example: an estimated 1000 new long-stay patients every year means 11,500 beds in the hospitals are needed. A yearly reduction of new long-stay patients by half would eventually