

## INTRODUCTION

**I**n the 1950s and early '60s the treatment option for anyone having a serious mental illness in Vancouver was a general practitioner (G.P.) or a private psychiatrist. Otherwise it was Riverview Hospital in Coquitlam, with the patient often committed there by the courts. During that period, Riverview had a population of 5,500. Hospital stays were often counted in months and sometimes years. At the present moment (2017), Riverview still exists, but it is a shadow of what it once was, with a patient population of around 100. Most of the buildings are deserted and crumbling, and discussions are underway to turn the beautiful grounds into a park, a museum featuring the history of Riverview, or to prime real estate, or perhaps an amalgamation of all three. People with mental illnesses now are treated in the community, and, if they need to be hospitalized, are admitted to general hospitals, the same as patients with other illnesses. A long stay is now considered anything over a month. How did all this change? When and how did it happen? This is the history of the Greater Vancouver Mental Health Service (GVMHS) from its beginnings in 1973 until its demise in early 2000.