

PSYCHIATRIC EMERGENCY SERVICES

Summary

The Grand Jury investigated staff morale, staff and client security, and other issues at the Sonoma County Psychiatric Emergency Services (PES) Norton Center facility. This report, originally published as an Interim Report in February 2002, has been updated to reflect events of the past three months. Changes in emphasis were made to reinforce the biggest issues. F.4 is a new Finding and R1 is a revised Recommendation.

The Grand Jury concluded, after extensive interviews, that both staff/management communications and staff morale are poor. After the offer by management to meet with staff individual members, morale remains unchanged.

The Norton Center is old and lacks modern security monitoring and safeguard systems. The Jury found the PES Norton Center facility is poorly maintained and not conducive to effective treatment of troubled clients.

While the Grand Jury study did not analyze program effectiveness, the investigation clearly showed that the PES staff is highly talented and dedicated to clients.

Reason for Investigation

The investigation began as a result of an incident involving significant damage to the PES Norton Center by a disturbed client and by the recent shooting by a disturbed person at the Nevada City Mental Health facility. The Grand Jury's initial interviews and a tour of the PES Norton Center facility identified additional concerns relating to staff morale, intradepartmental communications and the condition of the PES Norton Center facility.

Background

Mental Health Services, a Division of the Sonoma County Health Department, administers the Psychiatric Emergency Services program. PES operates the emergency psychiatric care facility for Sonoma County's mentally disturbed residents. It is open twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Patients may be referrals from community and other Sonoma County mental health programs, drop-offs by law enforcement, concerned citizens and family and patient walk-ins.

The design and implementation of security features in facilities like the PES Norton Center require a delicate balance of functionality and appearance. Security features should present a non-threatening environment for clients. After a lengthy review of the Norton Center PES facility and current security system technology, the Health Services Department initiated a program for improvement of PES security. The program is in the approval phase with

completion targeted for late 2002. This is almost two years after the Health Department acknowledged the urgent need.

Investigative Procedures

The Grand Jury:

1. Interviewed the following twenty-four persons:
 - Director, Health Services
 - Director, Mental Health Services
 - Two Mental Health Services Managers
 - Supervisor, Psychiatric Emergency Services
 - Eleven members of the PES staff
 - County Administrator
 - Auditor-Controller
 - Director, General Service
 - Program Manager, Architect Division
 - Director, Risk Management
 - Representative, Service Employees International Union SEIU)
 - Representative, Engineers and Scientists of California (ESC)
 - Director, Advocates for Mental Health
 - Chairman, Sonoma County Mental Health Advisory Board.

2. Reviewed the following documents:
 - Sonoma County Hazard Report procedures
 - Sonoma County Mental Health Division Adult Team Outcome Measures data
 - Design drawings and plans for the Norton Center Security Project
 - Timetable for the Norton Center Security Project, dated November 6, 2001
 - Sonoma County Employee Performance Report procedures
 - Extensive correspondence relating to PES facility and personnel security.
 - Responses to the Grand Jury Interim Report, Psychiatric Emergency Services, dated February, 2000

3. Toured the Norton Center PES and inpatient facilities and the Chanate Hall outpatient facilities.

Findings

STAFF MORALE IS LOW

- F1. PES staff morale is low. Communications between PES staff and Mental Health Division management is poor, and nonexistent in some cases. There is a prevailing staff belief that management does not value staff opinions and suggestions. The management styles of supervisors are consistently described by staff as non-responsive, confrontational, distrusting, intimidating, distant, and/or devoid of contact with staff.

- F2. Mental Health management does not acknowledge the depth of the aforementioned communications problem or its effect upon morale.
- F3. In response to last year's Grand Jury report, the Department of Health Services offered discussions with employees of the Mental Health Division to better understand staff issues. Employees were invited to meet privately with the Director of Health Services Department, the Director of Mental Health Division and a representative of the Human Resources Department. No one in PES accepted the offer. This supports the Grand Jury's earlier concern that the three-on-one sessions would inhibit frank discussion.
- F4. The Mental Health Department has advised the Grand Jury that a consultant has been hired to identify communication and morale issues.

SAFETY, SECURITY, AND ENVIRONMENT CONTINUE TO BE ISSUES

- F5. The PES staff is totally committed to its profession and to helping the mentally disturbed residents of Sonoma County. The work is inherently dangerous and requires constant vigilance.
- F6. The Norton Center is an old building with few security features to safeguard staff and clients.
- F7. The PES staff have become frustrated and apathetic in their attempts to bring to management attention their concerns relating to safety, environment, and infrastructure.
- F8. The contract security guards at PES Norton Center provide some benefit, but they are not trained (in many cases not physically capable) to intervene in staff – client incidents.
- F9. In January 2001, the Health Service Department launched a program for enhancement of Norton Center PES security. The analysis and design phases are complete and the project is now in the review, funding and approval phase. The project timetable calls for completion in late 2002. If the current schedule is met, two years will have passed since the Health Service Department acknowledged the gravity of the Norton Center PES security issues.
- F10. The PES facilities do not enhance the efforts of the staff. The maintenance and housekeeping are poor; its atmosphere is depressing. It compares unfavorably with the inpatient, the outpatient, and the children's mental health facilities.

Recommendations

- R1. The findings and recommendations developed by the outside consultant, hired by the Health Department to address PES communication and morale issues, should be provided to the Grand Jury and the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors.
- R2. Make the resolution of intradepartmental communications and PES morale problems a key management goal for all PES supervisory/management personnel.
- R3. Expedite the planned security improvements for the PES Norton Center.

- R4. Develop a county-wide procedure to expedite the design funding, approval and implementation of future high priority projects, particularly those related to security and safety.
- R5. Improve the daily maintenance/housekeeping of the PES Norton Center facility.
- R6. Improve the décor of the PES Norton Center, i.e. make the facilities appear less depressing for mentally disturbed clients.
- R7. Increase the refurbishment cycle (paint, repair, and replacement) for the PES Norton Facility. A facility such as the PES Norton Center requires more frequent refurbishment than conventional office spaces.

Required Responses to Findings

Director, Department of Health Services: F1, F2, F3, F7, F9, F10

Director, Mental Health Division: F1, F2, F7, F8, F10

Required Responses to Recommendations

Director, Department of Health Services: R1, R2, R3, R6, R7

Director, Mental Health Division: R1, R2, R5, R6, R7

Board of Supervisors: R3, R4