

MISMANAGEMENT: MENTAL HEALTH COMPLEX

In 2004, after a showdown with the hospitals over who's responsible for caring for mentally ill patients (see sections below about chronic bed shortages at Mental Health Complex) a Task Force found the county to be failing the mentally ill:

Hundreds of acutely mentally ill people are mismanaged each year in the county, warehoused in jail cells and sometimes left unattended to wander away from private hospital emergency rooms, the Milwaukee Mental Health Task Force has found.

The new panel's report blames a lack of coordination among mental health care providers, inadequate training for police, and a dearth of outpatient facilities for people with mental illness.

The findings offer the most comprehensive look at the system in more than a decade, gleaned from months of interviews with people with acute mental illness, health care providers, criminal justice workers, police officers, private hospital administrators and county health care administrators.

[Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 9/23/2004]

In 2006, two years after the Task Force findings and after supposed efforts to improve services for the mentally ill at hospitals and the Mental Health Complex, a Milwaukee Journal Sentinel investigative series chronicled "deplorable and sometimes deadly living conditions for people under the care of county psychiatric case managers."

Tony Hall roasted to death in the stifling heat of an unregulated rooming house.

Street thugs murdered David Rutledge.

John Collins died after falling from his wheelchair, down the stairs of the unlicensed, rodent-infested group home where his Milwaukee County caseworker placed him. For months after Collins' death, someone kept using his food stamps.

[Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 3/19/2006]

Problems outlined in first of three parts, 3/29/2006:

- *City building inspectors have failed to identify and close down these illegal homes. And they have never reported illegal group homes to the state licensing agency.*
- *County caseworkers, responsible for their clients' well-being, regularly send them to these houses and apartments, despite knowing how filthy and dangerous the buildings are. This is a direct violation of a federal court agreement.*

- *State group home inspectors generally don't investigate homes unless they are licensed. As a result, unlicensed, illegal group homes escape scrutiny.*
- *The federal government adds to the problem by allowing landlords to receive all of a tenant's disability check directly, despite the obvious opportunity for exploitation.*
- *Bureaucrats point their fingers at each other, claiming someone else is responsible.*
- *The problem is especially pronounced in Milwaukee County, where most of the state's mentally ill people live.*

The Behavioral Health Administrator said it was their own fault that they lived in squalor:

The problem was - and is - that there is not enough safe, affordable housing for people whose income today is limited to the roughly \$700 a month they get in Social Security or disability payments. That's \$8,400 a year, or about 15% below the federal poverty guideline.

Many landlords in better neighborhoods refuse to rent to people with psychiatric problems or criminal convictions, as people with mental illness often have, because they are afraid that the person might become violent or destroy their property. About the only ones who will rent to people with severely psychotic behavior are slum landlords looking to get a steady government check, case managers say.

Therefore, people like Rhodes have three choices: places such as Wimmer's broken-down house; a homeless shelter, if there is room; or the streets....One of her clients discovered a dead body in her backyard last summer and is now too frightened to let her 12-year-old daughter live with her.

Hill, the county's behavioral health administrator, makes no apologies for the placements, only explanations.

"The plain fact is that there is a critical lack of safe, decent housing in Milwaukee," Hill said. "We have no choice sometimes but to put people in these places. Believe me, these are the kind of choices that keep me up at night and give our case managers gray hair."

Hill said the decision of where a person lives ultimately rests with the person, not the caseworker. "It is their choice," he said. "Legally, we can't tell them where or where not to live."

[Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 3/19/2006]

Buildings that housed mentally ill were in some of the most dangerous neighborhoods and had health and safety violations – rats and roaches, no heat or running water, broken toilets, faulty wiring, etc.

Over the years, dozens of patients have died in these places from environmental flaws such as exposure to extreme heat.

County Executive Scott Walker said Monday that he is proposing spending nearly \$250,000 in next year's budget to enhance housing programs for people with chronic mental illness, at a time when other county programs are being substantially trimmed. His plan calls for some realignment of county agencies, including the creation of a housing section specifically for the Behavioral Health Division.

"We are hoping that by spending some money upfront, the county will actually save money in the long run," Walker said. He noted that studies show that a patient is less likely to relapse when he or she is in permanent housing.

"In addition to the altruistic reasons, there are some cost-effective considerations," Walker said.
[Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 9/22/2006]

Put privatization of case managers on hold after pressure from county employees who lobbied on the need for accountability.

[Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 9/22/2006]

Then came a state criminal investigation into the death of woman at the Mental Health Complex who went for four weeks without adequate food and water; died of a blood clot.

Investigation conducted by DOJ's Medicaid Fraud Control Unit – William Hanrahan was the Director, and John Knappmiller was assigned to be the chief criminal investigator.

When told of the probe by the newspaper, William Domina, Milwaukee County corporation counsel, said the county "welcomes any investigation into the treatment of any patient."

"We believe that facts that could not be revealed publicly will show that Milwaukee County acted appropriately under the law in the Anczak matter," Domina said.

Anczak, of Milwaukee, died of a blood clot. The Milwaukee County medical examiner determined that immobility and self-induced starvation and dehydration significantly contributed to the death. County officials have declined to comment on any aspect of her case, but medical records show that Anczak rarely ate or drank adequately from the time she was admitted on July 11 until her fatal blood clot developed on Aug. 8.

[Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 11/2/2006]

The Office of Quality Assurance of the Wisconsin Dept of Health and Family Services (Otis Woods, Director) also began an investigation into the death. This office oversees health care facilities and issues licenses. Their probe also included a second death of a man in July 2005 who overdosed on fentanyl (painkiller) while on suicide watch at the complex.

[Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 11/2/2006]

City partnered with County in creating oversight of safe housing for people with mental illness

Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett and Milwaukee County Executive Scott Walker announced Wednesday that they are appointing a permanent Commission on Supportive Housing to improve conditions for poor people with mental illness.

The move comes after a yearlong series of articles in the Journal Sentinel revealed that hundreds of people with mental illness were living in squalor. The newspaper found that some had died as a direct result of deplorable conditions.

Some died of heat stroke in sweltering rooming houses; one man fell to his death from faulty porch steps. Another man's body had badly decomposed before it was discovered.

Hundreds of others were found to be living in places that were in violation of city codes for broken smoke detectors, faulty wiring, infestations of roaches and rats, windows and doors painted shut, and broken toilets and furnaces

[Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 7/26/2007]

Feud with Board over moving Mental Health Complex to vacant St. Michael Hospital from Milwaukee County Grounds in Wauwatosa.

A cost analysis by county officials showed a 25-year lease with Weas will cost the county \$441.2 million, which is more expensive than renovating the existing complex or building a new facility.

Walker, however, said the project can be done for \$359.8 million, which is less than the county's other options, if operations of the building are privatized. All mental health treatment would still be administered by county employees, Walker said.

[Milwaukee Business Journal, 7/28/2008]

Used veto power to kill Board's plan to build a new Behavioral Health Division facility on Milwaukee County Grounds in Wauwatosa. Board did not have votes to override.

[Milwaukee Business Journal, 11/7/2008]

Cut hospital beds for mental patients

Cuts in the number of hospital beds for acutely ill psychiatric patients in Milwaukee County are causing concern among health care professionals who worry that there could be a mental health care crisis.

Since 1993, the county has cut the number of inpatient beds for acutely ill adults to 96 from 210, under a philosophy that less restrictive programs are better therapeutically and more cost-effective.

[Associated Press, 12/8/2003]

Crisis reached in providing mental health services due to bed shortages and increases in demands for services.

But county officials told the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel for a Sunday story that since late April, 62 patients have waited without treatment from two to 60 hours for a transfer to the county's Mental Health Complex in Wauwatosa. The delays occurred on 12 different days.

The complex contains the area's only psychiatric emergency room and by law must accept such patients. County officials say the facility, with its staffing shortages, is so crowded that it can't always safely accept all emergency detention cases.

[Associated Press, 6/27/2004]

Emergency plans aimed at temporarily easing backups in the crisis care system

Advocacy groups, meanwhile, urged deeper reforms and sought cooperation from area hospitals. "The situation is terrible," Tom Hlavacek, of the Wisconsin Coalition for Advocacy, said of the overloaded system that has meant treatment delays for the county's most volatile patients.

[Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 6/29/2004]



Walker blames hospitals for not servicing patients even though county has also cut beds and increased the burden on hospitals

"County Executive Scott Walker is trying to balance the budget and not raise taxes, and there has been a cutback in services that's contributed to this," said David Olson, president of the Medical Society of Milwaukee County.

But Walker blames hospitals for most of the overload problem at the complex.

"The situation is not because of the county budget situation," he said. "It's largely because . . . the largest health care providers essentially abandoned care of these patients." [Associated Press, 6/27/2004]

And not because the county had also abandoned care of these patients...resulting in increases of mentally ill in homeless shelters and in jail (see also 2006 stories, top of document, about mental health housing and resulting deaths of some from the squalor they were living in)

The county has cut the number of beds for patients with acute mental illness by more than half over the past 10 years, with the notion that private hospitals would care for such patients. Private hospitals have cut back, too.

Bed reductions fueled rise in homeless who are chronically and persistently mentally ill, and in numbers of people in jail with mental illness.

Likewise, directors of various homeless shelters throughout Milwaukee County say they have seen a rise in the number of homeless people who are chronically and persistently mentally ill.

"We are seeing it getting worse," said Holly Gardenier, executive director of the Guest House, a shelter that houses 76 men a night. [Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 12/9/2003]

County, Hospitals partner in "stopgap" solution

Jim Gresham, president of Covenant's behavioral health and continuing care division, said the county-hospital collaboration "is only a stopgap in addressing the mental health crisis" that will need more public funding in the long term.

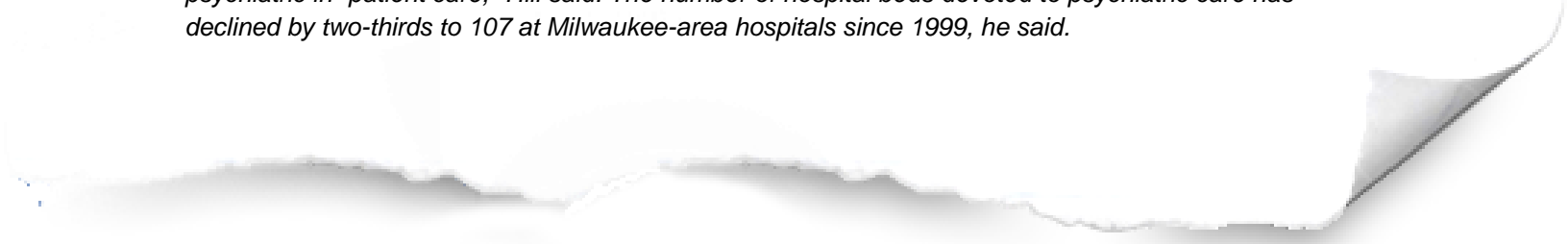
Acting County Health and Human Services Director Rob Henken said the county was taking other steps to address the crisis...

[Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 9/22/2004]

And in 2007, a repeat of the bed shortages

A boom in mental patients seeking treatment from Milwaukee County has fueled a potential \$2.3 million deficit for the county's mental health services budget, officials said.

"What we are seeing is the cumulative effect over the past several years of private hospitals getting out of psychiatric in-patient care," Hill said. The number of hospital beds devoted to psychiatric care has declined by two-thirds to 107 at Milwaukee-area hospitals since 1999, he said.



[Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 4/30/2007]

Opposed stimulus cash to build new mental health complex

Milwaukee County Executive Scott Walker opposes the request by three county supervisors for \$92.25 million in federal stimulus money to construct a new mental health complex.

But time is running out on his preferred option, which is to lease St. Michael Hospital, because the hospital is scheduled to be demolished by June 30.

County officials have been gridlocked for seven years on the question of how to provide new space for the county's Behavioral Health Division inpatient and nursing home operations. Federal cash could break the impasse, said County Supervisor Peggy West.

And in considering Walker's move to cut funding for day treatment mental health services, supervisors should make sure that the cuts don't harm delivery of those services. If the mentally ill are harmed by the cuts, supervisors should restore that funding. [Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 11/18/2009]

*The proposed budget avoids cutting off services to county clients, but would eliminate many front-line caseworkers and rely more on electronic case handling and other technology. In **mental health**, Health and Human Services Director Rob Henken revived a plan to complete the privatization of case management and community support.*

[Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 6/17/2006]

Federal Audit Uncovered Multiple Sexual Assaults, Rape at the Mental Health Complex

Federal aid for mental health center in jeopardy over sexual assaults

Milwaukee County could lose federal and state aid for its Mental Health Complex over several reported cases of patients sexually assaulted by other patients, officials said Friday.

The county was told in January to make numerous improvements to staff training and procedures, based on a federal inspection of the complex in Wauwatosa. Those improvements have already been made or promised, but the county faces further sanctions for failing to effectively manage the complex to protect patients, said Elizabeth Surgener, a spokeswoman for the U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services in Chicago. [Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 02/13/2010]

Mental Health Complex Cited in Sexual Assaults

Psychiatric patient became pregnant

The Milwaukee County Mental Health Complex comes under fire in a federal report for failing to protect a 22-year-old patient who became pregnant after sexual contact with another patient.

The 22-year-old woman reported some consensual sex with as well as at least one assault by the male patient, also 22, with a history of sexual aggression, the report says.

Under state law, any sexual contact with a mentally ill person is considered assault. The female patient is described as having mild retardation and a mood disorder.

The pregnancy and several other patient sexual assaults last year - including three other female victims assaulted by the same 22-year-old man - led to two federal administrative citations against the county hospital and the threatened cutoff of millions of dollars. Federal million of the county Behavioral Health funds account for about \$60 Division's \$186 million budget. [Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 03/10/2010]

State lawmakers call for audit of Mental Health Complex

Four Milwaukee-area lawmakers Thursday called for a state audit of the Milwaukee County Mental Health Complex, saying reports of patient abuse needed further investigation.

The state legislators, all Democrats, said services for people with mental health problems were "inadequate and severely mismanaged." Reps. Tamara Grigsby, Jon Richards, Pedro Colon and Sandy Pasch said an audit would help identify ways to improve the complex.

"It's disgusting, despicable how this complex has been managed," she said. [Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 04/29/2010]

Unacceptable trade-off: Segregating aggressive clients is preferable to letting them into gender mixed settings where they might commit violence – on men or women

According to the supervisors, Chianelli defended housing female patients with dangerous male patients to quell male-on-male violence and called it a trade-off that resulted in more sexual assaults of female patients. That kind of rationale is unacceptable. And while there is a sound rationale for housing males and females together, there is no good rationale for housing violent patients of any gender with other patients. [Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 05/12/2010]

Report slams mental facility: They note safety, food flaws

Milwaukee County comes under fire by state inspectors for shoddy conditions at the Mental Health Complex, including a series of fire and other patient safety violations, in three reports released Monday. Milwaukee County comes under fire by state inspectors for shoddy conditions at the Mental Health Complex, including a series of fire and other patient safety violations, in three reports released Monday.

The county has 45 days to correct the problems or could face a possible cutoff of federal funding, which comes to some \$40 million a year. [Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 06/14/2010]