

EL DORADO COUNTY GRAND JURY 2013-2014

PLACERVILLE OUT-PATIENT MENTAL HEALTH FACILITY

Case Number GJ-13-07

Reason for Report

There have been many news stories and much media attention over the past expressing concern regarding the lack of treatment and housing for mentally ill people in the United States. Members of the El Dorado Grand Jury wanted to identify the types of programs and facilities available in this county for individuals manifesting signs of mental illness.

Background

Grand Jury members visited the El Dorado County Out-Patient Mental Health Facility on November 11, 2013. This facility handles both juvenile and adult clients, and provides counseling services, as well as medication.

This facility is newly leased (October, 2013) space for the county. It is located at 768 Pleasant Valley Road in Diamond Springs. The prior facility was located at 670 Placerville Drive in Placerville. A review of relevant financial material regarding the new and old leases indicates that the county will save approximately \$682,000 over the 10 year term of this new lease. At the time of our visit, the county mental health group had been in this new facility just 2 weeks. We interviewed two staff members who were on site at the time of our visit. We were escorted throughout the entire building to inspect the new facility, and discussed the space as well as the various programs available for clients. There are 48 people on staff.

Findings

1. Having just been refurbished, the building is in excellent condition, although its unusual architectural design does not facilitate easy accessibility throughout the structure.

Response: The respondent disagrees partially with this finding. While the building does not provide internal access between the first and second floor, the accessibility is appropriate for the needs of the Mental Health Division, while also ensuring the appropriate separation between clients served in different programs (i.e. adults and children).

2. A new well-equipped community activity center has been established for adult clients.

Response: The respondent agrees with this finding.

3. There is a confidentiality issue in that some of the areas where service providers and patients discuss issues and treatment are not sufficiently soundproofed.

Response: The respondent disagrees partially with this finding. Sound masking equipment was installed prior to the Mental Health Division occupying the building. However, upon occupying the building Mental Health Division staff expressed concern the sound masking equipment was not sufficient. Subsequently, a second phase of sound masking equipment and improved insulation between offices was completed in March 2014 which addressed the deficiencies.

4. There is no interior access between floors one and two. Programs for adults are on the lower floor, and parents and children are seen on the upper floor. However, staff has to go outdoors to access one floor to the other; walking across the parking lot or using the uncovered exterior stairway.

Response: The respondent agrees with this finding that there is no interior access between floors one and two. However, it should be noted that design of this building not only meets the needs of the Mental Health Division, but is advantageous as it prevents the comingling of adult and minor clients in common reception areas or other parts of the building.

5. Since there are separate entrances for both the adult programs on the lower floor, and the juvenile programs on the second floor, the facility has been certified as ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) compliant.

Response: The respondent agrees with this finding.

6. The parking capacity at the facility (which was not adequate at the time of our visit) has now been increased to fit the building's use needs.

Response: The respondent agrees with this finding.

7. Outdoor direction signs at the facility are nonexistent

Response: The respondent disagrees partially with the finding. HHSA installed directional signage on the side of the building near the main entrance in the upper portion of the building, as well as a sign with directional information installed on a pole

in the parking lot at the lower section of the building. However, HHSA agrees the signage needs to be improved.

Recommendations

1. Soundproof the areas in the building where service providers interact with clients.

Response: This recommendation has been implemented. As part of the project plan extensive sound masking equipment was installed in the building prior to occupancy by the Mental Health Division. However, upon occupying the building Mental Health Division staff expressed concern the sound masking equipment was not sufficient. Subsequently, a second phase of sound masking equipment and improved insulation between offices was completed in March 2014 which addressed the deficiencies. As a result, no further action is necessary at this time.

2. Install outdoor direction signs so clients can easily determine where to park and access the proper segment of the building.

Response: This recommendation has been partially implemented. HHSA installed directional signage on the side of building near the main entrance in the upper portion of the building, as well as a sign with directional information installed on a pole in the parking lot at the lower section of the building. All signage was installed no later than May 1, 2014. However, HHSA agrees additional signage should be installed and plans to have this recommendation fully implemented by December 1, 2014.

3. Cover the exterior stairway to ameliorate safety concerns in inclement weather.

Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted and is not reasonable.

Like all exterior areas including the parking lot, parking lot stairs, and the public street and bus stop, the exterior stairs are exposed to inclement weather conditions. It is unreasonable to cover the stairs when the same concerns exist with all exterior areas of the property which cannot be covered or otherwise protected to ameliorate safety concerns. In addition, the landlord has recently installed a permanent shade structure that covers the exterior stairs. Although not designed for weather, it will partially address the Grand Jury's concerns.

4. After this department has been in this new space for six months, investigate the need and feasibility of creating an interior stairway/elevator for interior access between floors one and two.

Response: The recommendation has been implemented. At the time of this response, the Mental Health Division has been in this building for approximately eight months. Based on the programmatic requirements of the Mental Health Division, the access and design of the building meets the needs of the Mental Health Division. The

lack of internal access from the first to second floor serves as an appropriate segregation of clients by preventing the comingling of adult and minor patients in common reception areas or other parts of the building. Therefore, no further action is necessary at this time.