

Trenton Psychiatric Hospital Monitoring

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The New Jersey Division of Mental Health Services (DMHS) has established a new program to monitor the quality of care in state psychiatric hospitals. NAMI Mercer members Elaine Candelori, Patricia Korsak, and Tom Pyle currently are preparing to monitor Trenton Psychiatric Hospital (TPH), when the new program officially gets underway early in 2011.

“This innovative program supports the notion that mental health professionals and families, working together, can strengthen the power of advocacy,” stated Gregory P. Roberts, assistant director of State Hospital Management. “We aim to produce concrete, positive improvements in the delivery of services and in the conditions of treatment.”

For nearly 10 years, NAMI Mercer volunteer Bob Demers led the Family Partnership, an earlier TPH monitoring program, made up of representatives from Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, and Burlington Counties. Demers stepped down in June, and the program has been inactive since then.

TPH, a 400-bed psychiatric hospital is one of five psychiatric hospitals governed by DMHS .It was founded in the 1840s by Dorothea Lynde Dix, a lifelong crusader for those affected by mental illness.

“Many of the TPH residents have been rejected by society and even by their families,” stated Demers.” Every month, he would schedule teams of observers to visit the hospital and report on conditions to its Board of Trustees. Bob takes pride in knowing that the Family Partnership contributed to improving the lives of TPH residents.

The new state-wide program is modeled on the Family Partnership as well as the procedures of the Patient Services Compliance Unit and the court-appointed Doe v. Klein Committee that monitored conditions at Greystone Hospital from 1975 to 2009.

The DMHS Wellness/Recovery Transformation Statement of Feb. 2006 was the impetus for creating the new monitoring system. Assistant Commissioner Kevin Martone wrote: “The process for moving to a recovery-oriented system must be inclusive and collaborative...The Division will incorporate the recovery model into every policy, regulation, contract and expectation, but the effort will only succeed if the entire mental health community helps to shape the system.”

Elaine Candelori, who will lead NAMI Mercer’s volunteers, has a unique perspective on monitoring. Before her retirement, she was section chief of the TPH Raycroft Complex. “The medical staff welcomed the observers,” she said, and appreciated the additional “eyes and ears. Our relationship always was cooperative.”

Under the new program, the role of a volunteer monitor is to ensure that patients in state psychiatric hospitals receive appropriate care and services in a recovery-oriented system that includes a safe and therapeutic environment. The recommendation is that monitors visit the hospital once a month and work as twosomes. Their visit will be unannounced, except to the hospital liaison coordinator.

The monitors will observe patient care, including treatment and therapies; staff member activities; security, and confidentiality of patient information. They should report use of restraints and seclusion. Monitors also will survey the environment regarding cleanliness, noise, odor, privacy, crowding, furnishings, lighting, temperature, air, and water quality.

The monitors also will have the opportunity to interview consenting patients about their understanding of their treatment plan and their satisfaction with the type and quality of hospital services. All monitors must sign a statement of confidentiality pledging not to disclose patient information except to other members of the site review team.

It is the hospital's responsibility to review the assessment reports and take action to address deficiencies in a timely way. The hospital must document a remediation plan, assign a responsible person, set a target date for completion, and evaluate the effectiveness of the corrective actions.

If you are interested in serving as a TPH monitor, please contact Sally Osmer at 609-799-8994 or sosmer@namimercer.org. The DMHS is forming a small committee of experienced monitors and staff to interview candidates who have submitted an application. Those selected to participate in the program will require fingerprinting and background checks before beginning orientation.