

A Leader and a Refuge: SFGHMC's Psychiatric Emergency Services

It's late at night. In San Francisco's Mission District, a man is wandering the streets in a daze, knocking over trash cans and yelling incoherently. His behavior is frightening to those he passes, but underneath his bizarre actions, he is suffering with delusions that he is being persecuted. People recoil at his disturbing behavior, but most can't see his underlying fear and emotional pain. The police, responding to a call from a resident, pick the man up and bring him to the only place in the city that can help him right away.

San Francisco General Hospital Medical Center's Psychiatric Emergency Services (PES) provides 24-hour, seven-days-a-week emergency assessment, stabilization and disposition for some 6,000 acutely ill adult psychiatric patients a year. About 80 percent of PES patients are brought in by police, by ambulance or by their families.

"Because of the eruption of their illnesses, they are often a danger to themselves or others or so gravely disabled they can't take care of themselves," explains Robert Okin, MD, Chief of the SFGHMC Department of Psychiatry and Professor of

Clinical Psychiatry at UCSF School of Medicine. "By the time our patients are brought to the hospital, they're usually very ill, and are often struggling with severe psychosis, complicated by street drugs. Many are homeless. Some haven't eaten or slept for several days and are often very depleted. Some have been such a strain on their families over such a long period of time that they've exhausted them and thus lost their last threads of social support. Most are very poor and many are living on the margins of society.

"San Francisco General is a refuge for these patients," adds Okin. "It's one of the last hospitals in the city that is willing to care for them."

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In fact, since 1990, the number of private hospital beds for acute psychiatric patients has declined from 176 to 71, a decrease of 60 percent. This number may decrease further if a proposal of the Sutter Health system to close its 28 psychiatric beds at CPMC is adopted. The major reason for the dramatic decrease in psychiatric beds in the city is the relatively low reimbursement rates that insurance companies, MediCal and

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Piece by Piece, Quilting Business Grows

By any measure, last February's Heroes & Hearts luncheon was a success. Some 750 people were in attendance, including San Francisco's top luminaries. The gala event raised over 1 million dollars.

Several unsung heroes were both benefactors and beneficiaries of the event. Patients in the Department of Psychiatry's Vocational Rehabilitation Program crafted an exquisite quilt, which sold at the luncheon's auction for \$2,500.

The quilting program is one of several that provides vocational skills and training to psychiatric outpatients at SF General. Run as a business, the program enables clients to explore their creativity, provide input into marketing strategies, learn bookkeeping skills and more.

"The sense of pride that the quilting program instills is just amazing," says Amelia Truman, Vocational Program Director. "This business is giving them a sense of possibilities and changing their outlook on life."

The quilting program began about 10 years ago, with just a couple of clients making baby quilts. Now upwards of 30 clients make baby quilts, lap quilts and full-size quilts. Some are made by individuals, others by groups.

"We encourage clients to find patterns they like and choose what they want to make," says Truman. "We try to make sure they're not doing something too difficult for their level of ability. But we do want them to be challenged."

Truman and Vocational Program coordinator Gigi Lapuz run the program and serve as its review board, working with mental health and traumatic brain injury clients.

Through the Prevocational Program, clients take on jobs, operating a flower business, selling coffee, running a clothing cart, and providing other valuable services to the hospital.

"Many of the people we see are impoverished and marginalized. They try to make it through the system, but often there is no validation of their strength," explains Truman.

"Gaining skills and working in a business environment stabilizes the clients and gives them a whole new sense of self. We have business meetings where they are the staff, talking about growing the business," she adds.



The quilt auctioned at the Heroes & Hearts luncheon was made from richly colored Asian fabrics with the heart theme to celebrate Valentine's Day and Lunar New Year.

Learning to quilt and participating in the business has transformed one woman who recently joined the program.

"She came in and hardly talked to anyone. Then she picked up a quilting pattern and made something on her own," says Truman. "As she got more feedback, she started talking more and became more outgoing. She's found her creative passion. Now she keeps making quilts."

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SFGH's PES

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MediCare are willing to pay for psychiatric patients compared to medical and surgical patients. As private hospital beds have closed, the City has become increasingly reliant on the 100 psychiatric beds in its public hospital, San Francisco General, as the locus of acute psychiatric care.

Caring for patients whose mental illness is chronic and persistent is an extraordinary challenge that requires creativity, innovative strategies and a range of skills.

Over the past several years, Okin and his staff have developed a model of care that extends well beyond the customary parameters of psychiatric treatment to one in which the entire person and the quality of his or her life are the center of concern. Of course, when patients are hospitalized, their psychiatric illnesses and medical problems are addressed first. But preparing the way for them after they leave the hospital is just as crucial to their recovery.

A team of psychiatrists, psychologists, nurses, occupational therapists, vocational counselors, substance abuse counselors and social workers provides effective, appropriate care tailored to the special needs of individual patients. Case managers coordinate the efforts, ensuring that clients receive housing, financial entitlements, and access to community services. The multidisciplinary approach is not only effective; it's cost efficient as well.

"Paying attention to the quality of our patients' lives isn't just a philosophical nicety. It's a requirement for promoting greater psychological stability, thereby decreasing the need for repeated hospitalizations," Okin says. "When patients are brought to us, we provide a safe space with staff who can talk to them in a thoughtful and reassuring way. This is critical in making accurate diagnoses. Because many patients have serious physical problems in addition to psychiatric problems, we provide them with medical care. We prescribe medications that are often extremely useful. And we give patients a respite from the stresses they experience on the street, which also helps them withdraw from the illegal substances they've been taking."

For San Francisco's diverse population, cultural sensitivity and attention to special needs are key components in providing effective care. Four inpatient units in the SFGH Department of Psychiatry are devoted to the problems of specific groups of patients: Asian/Pacific; African American; Latino and women; and HIV-infected and gay, lesbian and transgendered people. A fifth unit treats people from the San Francisco County Jail.

"While many of the staff of these specialized units speak the language of their monolingual patients, these units are also able to deal with the cultural factors that contribute to the way psychiatric illnesses develop or are expressed," says Okin. "For example, someone from Vietnam might experience depression and describe it as a physical symptom, a heaviness of the heart. There are other differences in population groups that staff need to recognize, as well. For example, certain Asian patients seem to be particularly sensitive to certain antipsychotic medications. The staff are experts in the biological, psychological, emotional, social and cultural issues of the populations they serve."

That level of expertise and caring has made the SFGH Department of Psychiatry a national leader in the field. The department has won numerous national awards for its ethnic/minority focus inpatient units, including the prestigious Creativity in Psychiatric Education Award from the American College of Psychiatrists. It is the only department in the country to be recognized on two separate occasions by the National Association of Public Hospitals and Health Systems for its creative efforts to address the needs of those patients who are most vulnerable. In 2006, the department was awarded the San Francisco Department of Public Health's Award of Excellence for its Ethnic and Minority Inpatient programs.

The quality of the department's services is complemented by the quality of its teaching program.

"The best psychiatric residents in the country are drawn to this program," says Okin. "The faculty and staff who work in the department are second to none."

"Whatever discipline the staff belong to, they possess deep compassion, psychological intuition and clinical wisdom. They have a unique capacity to relate to people who have had life-long difficulties in making personal connections," he adds. "And they have a real sense of caring about people who often have difficulty evoking sympathy in the general public."

By any measure, the department's efforts are paying off. Studies continue to show that coordinated, intensive rehabilitative services best meet the needs of patients with serious and persistent mental illness. Okin says he and his staff see evidence of success stories every day.

"The thing that amazes and inspires those of us who work in this field is how frequently we see our patients succeed," he adds. "It may not be apparent to the general public, because our patients get noticed less as they become stabilized and thus integrated into the community. But we know and they know just how far they've come."🌟

Quilting Business

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"It's great for us that she's making all the quilts, but it's doing so much for her. She engages in conversation with her peers, and participates in staff meetings," Truman adds. "Our business is parallel to any employment situation. Components like responsibility and accountability are embraced here."

"It means so much to see the spark in our clients. They've been beaten down so much in their lives," Truman concludes. "Now they have something of their own."🌟



Gary Mathis has been with the vocational rehab program for almost 3 1/2 years, 2 of which he has been quilting.

Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation awards grant to VMI

The Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation, based in New York City, recently granted the San Francisco General Hospital Foundation \$100,000 to complete equipment needs for the new Interpreter Call Center at San Francisco General Hospital Medical Center and to expand Video Medical Interpretation (VMI) services in all of the hospital's specialty care clinics and the Emergency Department. This significant grant will help San Francisco General Hospital Medical Center improve patient-healthcare provider communication and reduce wait time for interpreter services. The use of VMI technology by SFGHMC's Interpreter Services has been recognized as a model for other healthcare providers locally and internationally.🌟

HEROES & HEARTS

WANTED: A Few Good Men and Women

San Francisco General Hospital Foundation is once again sponsoring its Heroes & Hearts Luncheon in Union Square on February 14, 2008. This event is an opportunity to honor those within the community who have demonstrated exceptional and inspirational behavior. Our goal is to salute these special individuals by telling the city their stories.



Photo by Thomas J. Gibbons

2007 Heroes left from Left to Right: Pat Putney, Occupational Therapist; Margaret Hagan, SFGHMC Volunteer; Laura Mahlmeister, RN, PhD, SFGHMC; Captain Niels Tangherlini, SFFD; Sergeant Mary Dunnigan, SFPD.

Do you have a co-worker or colleague who has given above and beyond to the citizens of this great city? Have they implemented an idea or program that makes San Francisco a better place to live? Have they saved a life, wiped a tear or provided a needed hug. Did they help restart a life, make a difference to a family in stress? Have they made the workplace a better place to be? Please help us identify the police officer, the firefighter/paramedic, SFGH employee and the community member that has made a difference.

Guideline for nominations:

- A Nominee must reside and /or work in the city of San Francisco
- A Nominee must have rendered noteworthy service to an individual or the community as a whole (e.g. has demonstrated exceptional or inspirational behavior either through direct action such as saving a life, or through a creative idea that has extraordinary benefits)
- Nominations can not be considered for posthumous awards
- All nominations must be received by Monday, Nov. 12, 2007

For additional information, please contact:
Katherine Moe at Katherine.Moe@sfgfhf.net or 415-206-4478

To review past recipients or download nomination forms: www.sfgfhf.net



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SAVE THE DATE

for the Staff Appreciation Luncheon



Friday, September 14

To find out how to help support this event to recognize the amazing staff of SFGHMC, please call **415-206-4478** or email kmoe@sfgfhf.net.

Make your tax-deductible donation today using the giving envelope provided.

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