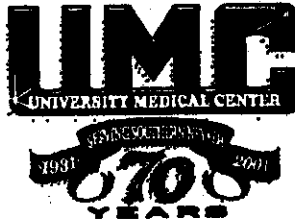


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October 3, 2003

Research Division
Nevada Legislative Counsel Bureau
401 South Carson Street
Carson City, NV 89701-4747

To Whom It May Concern:

REF: Printed Testimony
Mental Health Patients

My name is Doctor Dale M. Carrison. I am the Medical Director of the Department of Emergency Medicine at University Medical Center of Southern Nevada in Las Vegas. I am also the Regional Medical Director for my group, Emergency Physicians' Medical Group, which also gives me administrative responsibility for the St. Rose Hospitals (i.e. Siena and DeLima Campuses).

Mental illness is not a crime. However, in our community, mentally ill patients have fewer rights than criminals do. Mentally ill patients can be certified under a Legal 2000, and there are no statutory requirements to get them to a mental health facility for evaluation. They merely languish in the emergency departments in the Las Vegas Valley, until such time as a bed opens up at Las Vegas Mental Health.

I applaud the Governor and the legislature for noting this problem, and for allocating funds so that a new mental hospital can be built, to better serve our community.

Too often, the mentally ill patients are ignored, using the mentality that, "out of sight is out of mind". This is akin to the ostrich placing its head in the sand. In the Month of September alone, there were multiple days in the Las Vegas Valley where there were greater than 70 (seventy) mentally ill patients holding in hospital emergency departments. To think of this in realistic terms, and to be able to understand the impact this has on the other citizens of the County, is exactly the same as shutting down two thirty-five-bed hospital emergency departments. A thirty-five-bed hospital emergency department is bigger than the average emergency department in the Las Vegas Valley. The legislature must understand that, if there is an outbreak of a flu-like illness, etc., in the Las Vegas Valley, we have multiple beds that would not be available for medically ill patients. Psychiatric patients waiting in the valley's emergency departments have been medically cleared by an emergency medicine physician, and should have been sent to a mental health facility, but could not because of the limited resources of Las Vegas Mental Health. When these beds are not available, these patients are simply taking up room in the emergency departments, and are preventing those

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EXHIBIT <u>E</u> Mental Health	Document consists of <u>3</u> pages
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Entire document provided.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Due to size limitations, pages ____ through ____ provided.	
A copy of the complete document is available through the Research Library (775-684-6827 or e-mail library@lcb.state.nv.us).	
Meeting Date <u>12-9-03</u>	

emergency departments from seeing other medically ill patients. Psychiatric patients in the emergency departments are not receiving medical care, but are simply locked up, awaiting their transportation to Las Vegas Mental Health, in order to receive evaluation and treatment for their mental illness.

Recently, Doctor David Rosen presented to the Medical Advisory Board of Clark County, a proposal saying that our State had allocated \$70,000 for a psychiatrist, and made a request that the hospitals provide another \$70,000 so that there could be mobile psychiatrist, or a psychiatrist available to see these patients in the emergency departments, and make a determination as to their need for hospitalization. I have great difficulty agreeing with this, noting the limited resources that the hospitals are already experiencing. It would seem to me that it is the State's responsibility, and one of the myriad of reasons that we have for the crisis that has developed, is the lack of foresight on the administration of the State's mental health system.

Approximately three years ago, Doctor Carlos Brandenburg was at a meeting, where he stated that, "there is no mental health problem", although members of the audience strongly disagreed with his opinion. At that time, we were concerned about holding 15 or 20 patients in the Las Vegas Valley, awaiting placement at Las Vegas Mental Health. Clearly, that has escalated into numbers four to five times that amount.

Until the new hospital is completed, and even then, the mental health system must have greater resources to protect, not only the mental health citizens, but also those citizens who are seeking medical emergency care who cannot find available beds in the emergency departments because they are being taken by mentally ill patients.

What, then, is the solution? There is no quick fix for this problem. There is a short-term solution and a long-term solution. The short-term solution is to provide further resources to Las Vegas Mental Health so that they can, in fact, hire the psychiatrists they are seeking to provide mobile services and/or supervision of the newly-instituted program of psychiatric social workers who will evaluate patients being held in the Las Vegas Valley emergency departments. The short-term solution requires resources. It requires money to be made available for providing staff and facilities in order to be able to evaluate, in a timely manner, the mentally ill patients that are currently being held in our emergency departments. The long-term solution is in development, with regard to the psychiatric hospital that is to be constructed, but the long-term solution must also include the resources for Las Vegas Mental Health and the State mental institutions to adequately serve the mentally ill population in the Las Vegas valley.

In closing, I would make a plea on behalf of the mentally ill patients, and their families, who have few resources in their communities to serve their needs. As I mentioned earlier, criminals have more rights than mentally ill patients. A person who has been committed on a Legal 2000 merely stays in an emergency department until they can be transferred. We have had patients that have remained in the emergency department for up to ten days, waiting for placement in Las Vegas Mental Health. Can you imagine what a criminal attorney would do if his or her client was being held in custody without any

hearing whatsoever, and essentially, having no rights whatsoever, including the right to call an attorney.

I respectfully request that this Committee, and the legislature, investigate this problem, its overall impact on the Las Vegas community, and the threat that it poses to medically ill patients seeking care in our emergency departments.

Thank you for your action with regard to this important matter. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can provide further information or clarification regarding this problem.

Sincerely,

Dale M. Carrison, D.O.
Director
Department of Emergency Medicine
University Medical Center of Southern Nevada

DMC/kal

cc: Joe Hardy, M.D., Nevada State Assemblyman