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# New report shows unresolved problems psychiatric hospitals

By CHRIS EHRMANN November 26, 2019

HARTFORD, Conn. (AP) — A new report by a Connecticut disability rights group outlines “pervasive” problems related to treatment of patients at two state-run psychiatric hospitals.

Disability Rights Connecticut, which unveiled its report Tuesday, found 11 concerns with the way both Whiting Forensic Institute and Connecticut Valley Hospital are run.

The first issue detailed in the report deals with staff using restraints for discipline in lieu of treatment, or for their convenience.

Disability Rights Connecticut is the successor to the Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities, an independent state agency that investigated discrimination and abuse claims. That organization was abolished in 2017 and the independent Disability Rights Connecticut took the responsibility over.

“The idea was not to rehash the abuse scandals but to investigate what happened in the wake of the abuse,” Gretchen Knauff, executive director of the organization, said in an email.

Ten Whiting staff members were arrested and 35 others were fired related to the abuse of a 62-year-old patient in 2017. A former nurse was sentenced to prison time on cruelty and disorderly conduct charges.

The abuse led to legislative hearings, management changes and a separate task force that is considering deeper reforms, including shutting down the state-run facility.

Diana Shaw, spokeswoman for Connecticut’s mental health department, wrote in a statement that the department is reviewing the report and is eager to work with the group on ways it can continue to improve care and services at the hospitals.

“The role of independent agencies, such as DRCT, is an important one as they provide an external review of government,

industry and organizations in the public realm,” the statement reads.

Other problems detailed in the report include patients being denied rights like receiving visitors.

Additionally, inadequate death investigations along with inadequate abuse and neglect reporting and a dependence on using drugs on patients were revealed.

The group offered several solutions including removing Connecticut Valley Hospital’s exemption from the Department of Health licensing, adding that oversight would help hold the hospital accountable to the same standards as other psychiatric hospitals across the state.

“We have to change the culture, and in a place that large, it’s very difficult,” said Knauff.

Other solutions include training mental health police on patients’ civil rights and secure independent investigations into all deaths.

For now, the recommendations are based on the investigation they conducted into the hospitals but did not investigate all aspects of either hospital.

Knauff said the end outcome would be “a change in the organizational culture that addresses the findings and recommendations or our report in a way that brings real treatment and recovery” for patients.

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Chris Ehrmann is a corps member for [Report for America](#), a nonprofit organization that supports local news coverage, in a partnership with The Associated Press for Connecticut. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

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