

## News Release

January 15, 2007

### **A Complaint against Alaska Psychiatric Institute, Anchorage, Alaska, (State-run acute care psychiatric facility)**

How many individuals convicted of a crime or accused of a crime, awaiting trial, etc. are placed in non-forensic units outside of the forensic unit each year, on average, at API?

We have serious problems with any individuals convicted of violent crime, sexual assault or any individual accused of a crime awaiting trial/ prosecution being placed outside API's forensic unit, in a non-forensic unit, even for an evaluation.

To our understanding of Alaska state statute, psychiatric patients cannot be put in a jail unless there are extraordinary circumstances present. And if a psychiatric patient is put in a jail, they must be kept separate from the criminals. Conversely, the same rule should apply—those convicted of a crime or accused of a crime should not be mixed with psychiatric patients in a State psychiatric facility.

In 2005, the State of Alaska dedicated a new acute care psychiatric hospital. State officials and hospital officials knew how many beds would be needed in the forensic unit.

There are presently 5 hospital units at API. One of them is the forensic unit –Taku. Those convicted of a crime and accused of a crime in jail are now brought to the new API for evaluation. Too often, forensic patients are put into Susitna and Katmai units because of administrative decision, etc.

A recent Anchorage Daily News newspaper article stated that a person in API's forensic unit who was convicted of a violent crime requested more rights. Hospital management simply moved the person from the forensic unit to the Susitna unit. It was an administrative decision, not an issue of overcrowding.

A person who has a nervous breakdown has a right to be kept separate from criminals who have committed a crime or are in jail accused of a crime awaiting trial, etc.

Alaska psychiatric Institute's management had years of figures---they knew how big their new forensic unit had to be to prevent mixing forensic patients with regular patients.

API management has to be asked to stop mixing forensic patients with regular patients. Records have to be kept of how often it happens.

When a forensic patient is placed on a regular unit, the other patients and their families should have the right to be notified, especially when the forensic patient has a sexual abuse history and/or violent crime history.

(Con.)

As a former API patient, I feel that API's practices puts a recovering mentally ill patient without a criminal history in grave danger; a concept antithetical to the purpose of psychiatric facilities. The two populations should never be mixed, in my opinion, because it is so harmful to the recovery of regular patients, who need a peaceful, safe environment to aid recovery.

If new rules are necessary to prevent the mixing of regular patients and forensic patients, then we are requesting that action be taken to write new rules.

One of the problems is Alaska's DHSS / Behavioral Health does not see a difference between someone who is mentally ill and someone who commits a violent crime. The State facility, API, has to be asked to comply with common sense and Alaska statute's intent.

Thank you for promptly looking into this matter and sending a response.

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