

Letter to the Editor—ADN**February 2, 2008**

Editorial Page Editor,--Mr. Matt Zencey,

We read ADN's editorial about sexual assault and abuse. (2-2-08) We are asking that more of the story be told by ADN.

Children are one of the most vulnerable populations that suffer from sexual abuse—but just as vulnerable are individuals with a mental illness and in Alaska that number ranges into the thousands. Acute care psychiatric patients / consumers almost without exception have dementia or diminished capacity and in some ways are child-like. Those with a developmental disability are also in a vulnerable category.

From the standpoint of a sexual predator, the acute care psychiatric patient./ consumer makes the ideal victim. Consumers frequently mix delusionary ideas with factual reporting, therefore hospitals, courts and law enforcement often tend to discount a consumer's entire report of sexual abuse / assault.

There are 82+ Behavioral Health grantee psychiatric facilities in Alaska. The state of Alaska does not keep clear statistics of the grievances filed in the 82 grantee facilities. That would include sexual abuse, sexual assault, etc.

DHSS presently offers no assistance to patients filing grievances. All 82 psychiatric facilities should be required to have an urgent grievance procedure and all sexual abuse allegations, physical abuse, denial of services, denial of rights granted by statute should be reported within 24 hours to a state DHSS office for assistance and oversight to protect the consumer. (Those statistics should also be maintained.)

As a note, 3 sexual abuse allegations were lodged by patients at API -'05/'06. None of the patients received a written answer; none of the grievances were heard in front of an Impartial Body (AS47.30.847); none of the grievances were reported to DHSS; none were heard past the walls of API.

There are about 82 other psychiatric grantee locations in Alaska. There needs to be changes in keeping statistics and offering assistance to psychiatric patients / consumers by the state.

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