

PATIENTS, from page 1

and Sacramento civil rights attorney Mark Merin filed a suit in June against administrators at Rawson-Neal on behalf of Brown and other patients wrongfully bused to California.

The suit alleges that patients' constitutional rights were violated when the hospital involuntarily discharged them from the facility and sent them across state lines. The suit claims that patients were medicated before their discharge, forcing them to make the journey in drugged states, incapable of giving informed consent to what was happening to them.

Mary Woods, spokesperson for the Nevada Department of Health and Human Services, says that while there have been problems with the state's Transportation Back to Home Communities program, they have been overblown.

According to Woods, when the department became aware that staff did not follow program policies, it immediately initiated a review. Between July 1, 2008 and March 31, 2013, the hospital purchased bus tickets for nearly 1,500 patients, or 4.7 percent of all discharges. An analysis of those discharges found only 10 instances over this time period where there was not enough documentation to know for certain if staff had confirmed that there was housing and other supportive services waiting for patients at their destination.

Woods also says that the hospital has terminated medical staff. It has also revised policies to require more thorough oversight

of travel arrangements and for a chaperone to accompany the client to their destination, according to Woods. Additionally, she points out that the state has increased funding for mental health services, and a recent outside review of the Rawson-Neal facility was generally positive.

However, Gabriel Zitrin, spokesperson for the San Francisco city attorney, told Street Roots that the problems with Rawson-Neal really are that dire.

"Our suit represents the very tip of the iceberg," he says, pointing out that 24 patients being sent to one municipality over the course over a five-year span suggests that there was a widespread problem at Rawson-Neal. He also says that those are just the instances uncovered by the city attorney's investigation.

In August, a review of Rawson-Neal by the U.S. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services found evidence that there were significant problems with how the hospital discharged patients.

David Austin, spokesperson for Multnomah County, says that county staff handling social services haven't seen any indication that Rawson-Neal was sending patients their way.

Renaud, of the Mental Health Association of Portland, says that the analysis from the Nevada Department of Health and Human Services can't be trusted to provide an objective assessment of patient dumping practices by the Rawson-Neal hospital. He says that the Oregon attorney general, which didn't respond to a request for comment by press time, needs to look into

the matter to determine if any Rawson-Neal patients, or patients from other facilities, were improperly sent to Oregon and to take legal action if necessary.

Patient dumping was once a fairly routine practice that has abated in recent years, says Renaud. Today, he says, it's more likely to occur in small towns, which don't have the resources to properly address mental health issues, where a local sheriff might take a mentally ill person to the edge of town and tell them to keep walking.

"That's what people want to have happen to people with mental health and addiction problems. They want them to go away," he says.

Renaud says that there are some mentally ill individuals who will improve with the right treatment, and there are some that simply won't get better. Reduced budgets for hospital administrators have made some of their already-tough choices even tougher.

"So as a hospital administrator, are you going to spend money on people who are going to benefit, or are you going to spend money on people who are not going to benefit?" says Renaud. "It's a real problem. It's not just mean people or lazy people, but when you stress the system by underfunding it and undermanaging it you get these kind of problems."

"Our suit represents the very tip of the iceberg."

— GABRIEL ZITRIN
SPOKESPERSON FOR THE
SAN FRANCISCO CITY ATTORNEY

R2DToo, from page 2

gold compared to being alone and isolated on the streets.

R2DToo has proven over the past two years that they can provide a refuge to a range of individuals and families. They do so in harsh conditions, under the microscope of the media and community, non-violently and in collaboration with a range of partners, including social-service agencies, businesses and neighborhood groups. For better or worse, they are providing more than 50 people experiencing homelessness a safe place to rest each and every night. You can't ignore that.

Change is seldom easy. When Street Roots began, many businesses disapproved. Some people in the city were disinterested or against it altogether. Others saw a good

idea. Fifteen years later, having helped house hundreds of people and offer an alternative income to those who have nothing, we have a positive effect on Portland every single day. There's no reason to believe that Right 2 Dream Too can't do the same.

In today's economic landscape, solutions won't always look like they used to, and they will challenge our community to think differently and work together. Solutions always do.

The measure of whether the Pearl Neighborhood Association is right or wrong on their rebuke of R2DToo will not be determined by the outcome of the lawsuit. In the cold hard letter of the law, and they probably have a strong case to keep R2D2 from occupying a place in their neighborhood.

The judgment lies in the neighborhood's actions; responding out of the gate with a stereotypical fear of the homeless that stifles both dialogue and opportunity across the board.

Old Town, the neighborhood where Street Roots resides understands full well what it means to shoulder the responsibility of the poor and homeless.

You can blame the outcomes on the lack of public process, or point your finger at me, or others and say we're blaming the rich, but I don't believe any of those things are true. I believe R2DToo should be welcomed by the Pearl District because it's the right thing to do.

R2DToo deserves a place to call home in Portland. It deserves the respect of the residents in the Pearl.

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