



Napa State Hospital Needs ***SAFETY NOW!***

Workers from the California Department of Mental Health (DMH) are inviting everyone to the Safety Now! Rally at Napa State Hospital, an inpatient psychiatric facility run by the California Department of Mental Health (DMH). Workers, patient advocates, and community members will be rallying to send a message to hospital officials that not enough has been done to improve patient and staff safety at Napa State Hospital.

The Safety Now! Rally, organized through a joint effort by SEIU Local 1000, AFSCME Local 2620, the California Association of Psychiatric Technicians, and the Union of American Physicians and Dentists, will be held on Wednesday, January 19, 2011 from 11 am until 1 pm at the front gate of Napa State Hospital (at the corner of CA-221 and Magnolia in the city of Napa).

Last fall, Donna Gross, a psychiatric technician at Napa State Hospital, was strangled by a patient on the hospital grounds. Less than two months later, a rehabilitation therapist suffered four skull fractures after being assaulted by a patient who just days earlier had attacked a custodian. A large number of patients with a history of criminal violence have been committed to California DMH facilities in the last decade--*The New York Times* reports that today 92 percent of patients are sent to DMH by the criminal justice system, whereas 15 years ago it was just 20 percent (12/16/2010). Assaults on workers and patients have been multiplying at Napa State Hospital during this same period, as Department of Mental Health managers have done too little to prevent some violent patients from preying on others.

The results are disturbing:

- **There were nearly 200 attacks on hospital staff in the second quarter of 2010, four times as many as in 2009 (*Los Angeles Times* 11/3/2010)**
- **Patient assaults in the second quarter of 2010 soared to 692, a sevenfold increase from the same quarter the previous year (*Los Angeles Times* 11/3/2010)**
- **In 2009, there were 1580 crimes reported at Napa State--including over 1,200 batteries--but few of those crimes were ever prosecuted (*The New York Times* 12/16/2010)**
- **Over the past two years, there were 224 instances when injuries inflicted by patient assaults caused Napa hospital staff members to miss at least one day of work (*The New York Times* 12/16/10)**

Safety Now! is a coalition of SEIU Local 1000, AFSCME Local 2620, the California Association of Psychiatric Technicians, and the Union of American Physicians and Dentists organized to promote greater safety in California Department of Mental Health Facilities. For more information, contact Sue Wilson at 510-926-0408.

State mental health workers and patient advocates have a shared interest in inspiring DMH to make safety a priority in all of its facilities. Coalition members are now working with elected officials to develop workable legislative solutions for the problems faced by Napa State Hospital and the other DMH hospitals in the state. Under consideration are changes to the California Penal Code and other codes to address the challenge of providing therapeutic psychiatric care in the context of the changed patient population.

According to staff, there are also many measures that DMH administrators can implement right now to decrease violence in the facility. Solutions that can begin on the local-level, and might also form part of the broader legislative solution, include:

- **Assessment of All Patients:** Individuals admitted to a DMH facility should undergo an assessment to identify their potential for violence and determine any “special needs” in order to ensure the safety of staff and other patients.
- **High Security Unit:** Patients assessed as having a high potential for violence should be housed on a high-security, enhanced treatment unit—an idea first considered at Napa State Hospital in 2005, only to be abandoned by DMH managers the following year.
- **Increased Police Presence:** Each DMH facility needs dedicated safety and security personnel, such as Hospital Police Officers, stationed on the units, inside the security fence, at all times.
- **Increased Staffing:** Higher staffing levels would contribute to patient and staff safety by ensuring adequate assessment, supervision, and monitoring. This may include staffing ratios much like acute care hospitals have in place.
- **Monitoring and Alarms:** Patients with a potential for violence should not be allowed to roam around outside in the grounds free of supervision. Emergency call boxes, security cameras, and a working, integrated alarm system are essential to securing the vast Napa State Hospital grounds.

The patient population at Napa State Hospital and other Department of Mental Health facilities has changed dramatically, but to date DMH leaders have not taken adequate steps to adapt the hospital environment to the presence of more potentially violent patients. Solutions like the ones offered by the Safety Now! coalition are *necessary steps* for keeping staff and patients safe and for providing high quality therapeutic care. Several of these solutions can be implemented at little or no cost to the state. But even in the context of budget shortfalls, the fact remains that patients and staff are *dying* in Department of Mental Health facilities, so we *cannot afford to wait* for reform.