

Divya Reddy, M.D., Santa Clara County Psychiatrist

My name is Dr. Divya Reddy. I am a psychiatrist who has worked in Custody Health for Santa Clara County for 2 years as a coded doctor and 5 years as contract doctor prior to taking the coded position in the county. Last week, a day after the county reportedly signed the contract with Traditions Behavioral Health, I was informed by one of the directors that an agreement was reached in which TBH, a contracting agency, would take over the County's custody mental health services. Traditions plan to bring their own doctors and medical director to the jail to oversee both inpatient and outpatient care. As far as my own employment, the initial choices presented to me were either take a position in the County's outpatient county clinic or sign up as a contractor with Traditions if I wanted to continue working in the jail. That is something I will not do. Only then the choice of keeping my code but to work along with Traditions Psychiatrists and taking 100,000 less than what they would be paid for the same amount of work was presented to me.

In recent weeks we have all learned just how vulnerable our mentally ill inmates are, and that we as a community must do more to ensure their care. However, replacing those of us charged with their psychiatric care with contractors would be a huge step backwards. A contracting agency like TBH is staffed by doctors who oftentimes stay for just a few months before moving on to another assignment. By the time they are fully oriented to a system, they are gone. They have no commitment to our community and little accountability. Replacing experienced, long-term doctors with a series of contractors will make it far more difficult to provide inmates with the kind of mental health care they need and deserve.

There is a shortage of Psychiatrists in custody health because the salary here do not match the salaries in similar custody settings in other counties. If the compensation were improved, even short of the amount that TBH is offering now for our current positions, I am confident that we will be able to recruit more psychiatrists, retain them, and improve the overall quality of care being provided to our inmates with mental illness.

When you have the chance to, I hope you reject the contract with Traditions Behavioral Health.

And when you make plans for responding to the recent death of a mentally ill inmate, I hope you include inmate mental health care on the list of things worth improving.

Farah Khan, M.D., Santa Clara County Psychiatrist

My name is Dr. Farah Khan and I am the Acting Chief of Custody Mental Health Services. I've worked for the County of Santa Clara since February of 2009 and have been working in 8A, the inpatient acute psychiatric unit of the main jail, since June 2012. Last week I was told that the County has decided to outsource jail mental health service to Traditions Behavioral Health. This came as a complete shock to me. We work very hard to run the units efficiently despite being short of providers. I am proud of the quality of care we are able to provide mentally ill inmates, and I encourage the County to invest more in mental health services, rather than washing their hands of it completely. Our main problem is our high vacancy rate, but the County could easily hire enough doctors if they offered market rate salaries. If they offered the outrageous \$600,000 salary that Traditions is offering to do our jobs, they would have a long line of applicants. As the Board and the community plans its response to the horrific crime committed against a mentally ill inmate in our jail, one thing that should be considered is improving mental health services in the jails, not destroying them.

Heather Colbert, Chief of Emergency Psychiatric Services in Santa Clara

My name is Dr. Heather Colbert. I am Chief of Emergency Psychiatric Services in Santa Clara County and have been with the county for 9 years. I am speaking out against the contract signed by the County and Traditions Behavioral Health. I have been in this county long enough to know that psychiatric services for the incarcerated mentally ill have long been provided by a group of outstanding, dedicated psychiatrists who know their patients well and who are familiar with the outpatient and acute services in the county as a whole. The services they provide to their patients in custody could never be replaced by a series of contract workers unfamiliar with the mental health system in this county. Surely our incarcerated mentally ill patients deserve the best care we can provide.

Staffing shortages have plagued Custody Mental Health. This is due to the failure of the MH department to pay a competitive wage equal to that paid by Custody Mental Health in neighboring counties. It's a simple matter of allocating adequate resources to the care of this most vulnerable group of patients. If the salaries of the psychiatrists in Custody Mental Health were commensurate with those of neighboring counties, this so-called crisis would be averted and many qualified applicants who are able to work well within our current system could be identified.

Contractors cannot provide the same level of care that our county psychiatrists do and they do not share the same degree of oversight and accountability that we as county psychiatrists do. County psychiatrists can provide better care, more affordably than Traditions can. As a county psychiatrist, a taxpayer and a voter, I urge you to reject this effort to contract out Custody MH services to Traditions. Such a contract would mean a lower level of care provided at astronomical prices by psychiatrists lured by the promise of enormous salaries. Our incarcerated mentally ill patients deserve better than that.

Stuart Bussey, M.D., President, Union of American Physicians and Dentists

My name is Stuart Bussey and I'm the President of the Union of American Physicians and Dentists, the union which represents doctors here in Santa Clara County. UAPD was surprised to receive notice on Friday that Traditions Behavioral Health and representatives of the County of Santa Clara Behavioral Health have signed an agreement to immediately hire outside contractors to provide psychiatric services to the Main Jail, Elmwood Correctional Facility and Elmwood Correctional Center for Women. Two doctors currently employed in the Main Jail have been told that custodial health services will be performed by TBH contractors rather public employees, and that they should consider leaving County service and taking a job with Traditions if they wish to continue working with inmates.

We expect that the Traditions Behavioral Health contract will come to you for approval at your next meeting, and we urge you to reject it. Replacing your regularly-employed County doctors in custody health with contract workers will make mentally ill inmates more vulnerable than they already are. It will exacerbate a problem that this Board is working so hard to fix.

It seems to me that an appropriate response to recent events would be that the County improve service for mentally ill inmates by hiring more psychiatrists into the County and making sure they have the tools they need to do their jobs. You should provide enhanced psychiatry services to inmates of Santa Clara County facilities, not switch over to stop-gap care from contract workers. Mentally ill inmates need continuity of care, provided by doctors with experience, commitment, and a connection to this community. Those are all things that County-employed psychiatrists provide, which Traditions contractors cannot.

According to the contract with Traditions, the seven full time psychiatry contractor positions will cost Santa Clara County up to 3.731 million dollars per year -- that's more than \$525,000 per position, an outrageously high price. Invest that money in your current custody health program, and it will reap much greater rewards.