



NAMI

SUSPENSION TO HEALTH/MH

Alliance for the Mentally Ill of Buffalo and Erie County

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Hon. Judith Fisher
Erie County Legislature
25 Delaware Avenue
Buffalo, NY 14202

Dear Judy:

Thanks for the New York Times article re the death of Kendra Webdale and the Bellevue Project, with which I am somewhat familiar.

AMI fervently endorses the concept of involuntary outpatient commitment for treatment resistant or treatment-refractory patients placed in the community. It's absolutely essential to improve the quality of life for many patients, and frankly to reduce the care-giving burden for families and, perhaps, to reduce or prevent additional tragedies similar to this one and, unfortunately, too many others including those in the last year in Buffalo.

We are working very closely with Sam Hoyt who has taken a vigorous interest and made a commitment either to get legislation passed in the Assembly (the state Senate passed such legislation last year) or to get enabling legislation for a Bellevue-like project covering Erie County if state-wide changes are out of the question.

You can anticipate support for our position from various of the unions, the Allentown Association, the Forever Elmwood Association, some mental health professionals, and (I think) the community at large. The Buffalo News has already endorsed this position.

You can anticipate objections from Action for Mental Health, the Independent Living Center, perhaps from the Mental Health Association, and some mental health professionals.

I would be glad to discuss the issues in further detail at your convenience.

Sincerely yours,


Lynne M. Shuster

2M-20

Real Help for the Mentally Ill

By Sally L. Satel

Whenever a mentally disturbed person turns violent, a search for blame begins. In the few days since 32-year-old Kendra Webdale was pushed to her death under a Manhattan subway train and a schizophrenic man named Andrew Goldstein was charged with the crime, advocates for the mentally ill have blamed Gov. George Pataki for failing to re-invest the savings from de-institutionalization in community mental health services, as he promised. Others have blamed the de-institutionalization of people with problems like Mr. Goldstein's in the first place.

The problem is that the debate tends to be polarized: law-and-order conservatives want people permanently locked up, and nurturing liberals want more community-based services and housing but bridle at restrictions on patients' personal liberties. Society, meanwhile, must find a way to handle the thousands of severely mentally ill people who function quite well when on medication but who become violent, homeless or profoundly delusional when not being treated.

Some states have had success with "outpatient commitment" programs for patients like Mr. Goldstein who have a history of circulating through hospitals, halfway houses and clinics. Under this system, a court orders a person to follow a course of treatment, which usually includes anti-psychotic medications, while living in the community. The patient is carefully supervised, and if he does not comply, the police can be called — by a parent, doctor, group-home manager, for example — and the patient hospitalized against his will. The system is intended for patients with records of poor cooperation with treatment.

Several states with outpatient-commitment statutes have had success. In Iowa, North Carolina, Ohio and the District of Columbia, admissions to psychiatric wards were cut by half to two-thirds. Patients know they'll go back to the hospital if they don't participate in treatment. For some (even those who have previously failed to cooperate with treatment)

patients violates their rights. If we only had a better, more caring mental health system, this argument goes, then patients would cooperate without arm-twisting. What the critics refuse to acknowledge is that about half of all schizophrenics have no insight into

A law that might make a difference.

their own condition and no understanding of why they need medication. As for free will, the freedom to be psychotic is no freedom at all.

New York State, which has an estimated 227,000 seriously mentally ill adults, should put a statute on the books that allows outpatient commitment. It might help avert tragedies like the one this week. □

This week Mobil is donating its s

Dive starts

The scene is played out repeatedly these days: America's leading engaging in a dizzying scramble of next spring's graduating class

Many are eager to a minority talent. That's no surprise. global, diverse business environment corporations view finding and employing a business impetus to business schools, job creation in hand, companies find few African-Americans, Hispanic Americans or Native American

New York Times

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