

## Background – CMHIP

The situation at the **Colorado Mental Health Institute in Pueblo** (CMHIP), the Colorado state mental hospital, is critical. The institute serves over 400 patients with chronic and acute mental illness. This patient population has needs that cannot be served by local mental health centers.

A March, 2017 audit by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment found CMHIP had dangerously low levels of staffing (currently 42% staffed), and listed other deficiencies.

In May, a site visit from the Center for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) resulted in CMHIP being placed on “Jeopardy” status, which means it could lose the federal funds that constitute a large portion of its funding. The center will return on June 28<sup>th</sup> to see if the problems have been corrected.

In response, the CMHIP administration has demanded that staff in several disciplines work mandatory overtime and increase the number of treatment groups provided to patients. Staff members who work directly with patients are being required to work double shifts, often several times a week. This means many of them are working 16-18 hour days, without any prior notice. Staff that care for children and/or elderly relatives have to choose between caring for family or being disciplined for refusing to work overtime. Disciplinary actions include Write-ups, progressive discipline, and loss of licensure.

Management has responded by offering bonuses to new staff but no incentives for the staff who are currently employed by the hospital. There are wage discrepancies between CMHIP and other state agencies. For example, nurses, psychologists, and social workers are paid substantially less at CMHIP than at the Colorado Department of Corrections (DOC) .

Patients at CMHIP have been greatly impacted by this situation. Mental patients need a break as much as anyone. Being required to attend groups 8-10 hours a day, 7 days a week is too physically and psychologically demanding. Anxiety is contagious, and patients who sense staff are anxious and exhausted will likely become more anxious and agitated. Staff who have worked two 16 hour shifts in a row are fatigued, and may not be as observant and/or patient with highly volatile psychotic patients, which could result in serious injuries to patients and staff.

Here are some of the issues that need to be addressed:

- Safe staffing levels and reasonable treatment expectations for patients
- Better organization- Clearly defined workloads, allowing units to schedule overtime in advance, providing hot meals for staff on overtime
- Commitment to open and transparent processes
  - Consultants have repeatedly recommended streamlining administration, but administration has grown by 40% in the last five years while patient census has remained the same
  - share information on audits and outside evaluations
- Real pay improvements including retention pay and compression pay to help decrease the wage gap between other public and private sector jobs
- Commit to real culture change
  - End the intimidation, threats, and punishment that management has used to keep employees in line
  - Empower staff to use their expertise to help CMHIP move forward as a team and provide rewards for jobs well done.

For further information please contact Lola West,

Email: [weslolpwj@gmail.com](mailto:weslolpwj@gmail.com)

Phone: 719-320-1901

---

Please Contact the following with messages of support for changes at CMHIP

Governor John W. Hickenlooper

Phone: (303) 866-2471

Email: [john.hickenlooper@state.co.us](mailto:john.hickenlooper@state.co.us)

Twitter: @GovOfCO

Reggie Bicha, Executive Director of CO Department of Human Services

Email: [reggie.bicha@state.co.us](mailto:reggie.bicha@state.co.us)

Dr. Nancy Van DeMark, Director of Behavioral Health

Email : [nancy.vandemark@state.co.us](mailto:nancy.vandemark@state.co.us)

Google Colorado General Assembly for addresses of your local State Senator and Representative

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I am writing to express concern about the situation at CMHIP. As United Methodists, we are called to advocate for both the care and treatment of our most vulnerable populations, including persons with mental illness. We are also concerned with the rights and treatment of those who work in our mental institutions.

Some of the issues that I would like to see addressed are:

(Please feel free to adapt and add information from the other side of this document)

I hope that by working together to address these concerns, we can create a CMHIP that provides the highest level of care for the mentally ill while creating a positive and affirming work environment.

Sincerely,

(Your name and contact information)