

Board of Trustees
Alameda Health System
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Public Space
Item 61

June 27, 2019

RE: Fairmont Hospital Outpatient Behavioral Health Services staff reaction to proposed imminent consolidation of Fairmont Hospital and Highland Hospital IOP/PHP/Outpatient treatment programs.

Dear Trustees:

As a group of diverse professionals serving Alameda County's most vulnerable mentally ill population, we, the staff at Fairmont Hospital Outpatient Behavioral Health Services, are opposed to the proposed consolidation of Fairmont Hospital and Highland Hospital IOP/PHP/Outpatient treatment programs. This drastic action to solve a temporary budget gap, would permanently curtail levels of vital service in a normally profitable program. It would have a potentially devastating impact on patients, while not actually making fiscal sense. We are aware that leadership and trustees of AHS have a vast amount to worry about system-wide and may not understand the important issues at stake in our program, so we have outlined them below.

Benefits of IOP/PHP Underappreciated

- The substantial systemic financial savings of outpatient programs are well documented in that they greatly reduce inpatient psychiatric visits, ER visits, police interactions, community disturbances, and homelessness. This does not seem to be addressed in the budget considerations.
- Both the Fairmont and Highland programs have historically been under-supported and under-promoted by AHS. Neither program has reached their potential. For example, we have zero general web presence and virtually zero presence on AHS's website.
- The over 15,000 people in Alameda County with a severe mental illness are already vastly underserved and we need to be increasing services, not decreasing them. A gross reduction in services means more contact with PES, ER's, etc.
- It is documented that every episode of psychotic decompensation is neurologically detrimental, weakening the overall integrity of the brain which means greater cost to the respective communities of these individuals.
- There are no alternative IOP/PHP treatment programs (that accept Medicare/MediCal) in Alameda County.

Clients Benefit from Treatment in their Own Community

- Keeping clients treated within their own communities allows them to stay better enfranchised within their own communities where clients and their treatment teams can better access and integrate with existing sources of support such as churches, other social services, and family members.
- 2/3 of John George patients are from Oakland and so there is a great need for Highland's program in Oakland. 70 – 80% of patients at Highland's program are African American

and so closing an inner-city program and moving patients out to the suburbs will lead to potential further disenfranchisement from community support.

Institutional Racism and Racial Disparities Created by Closing the Highland IOP/PHP Program

Alameda Health System's public website states that this system is "a haven for the most vulnerable among us; and advocate for equitable, compassionate and culturally sensitive care regardless of social and financial barriers." Removing the Highland IOP program will contradict this assertion in the following ways:

- It is well documented that disparities exist in access and use of mental health services for racial minorities. 80% of patients at the Highland program are people of color. Removing access to this program will lead to even greater disparity and oppression while increasing vulnerability.
- Removing access will promote race-based inequity, which is a reflection of institutional racism.
- The poor, mentally ill, people of color who are served by the Highland program face multiple forms of marginalization due to race, ability, and SES. They are among the most vulnerable in the community, and removing local services runs counter to AHS's claim to be "a haven for the most vulnerable among us." Doing so would be removing the only safe space that the majority of these patients currently have in their lives, and thus would create even greater vulnerability.

Negative Impact of Consolidating Programs

- Suddenly increasing the client census by 20-25/day at the Fairmont program would create crowding in our current space. Crowding brings with it increased agitation for patients, increased conflict between patients, and more staff time needed to manage both.
- We know from our own experience of transporting clients long distances from South and East county to Treatment that crowding on vans and longer van rides will increase agitation and negatively impact patient motivation to attend treatment. Because of this, we expect that a number of clients from North County will not continue treatment and will therefore be at greater risk.
- Furthermore, if both programs are merged and patients from Highland do elect to attend Fairmont, Fairmont becomes effectively filled to capacity (we have a physical capacity of about 70 clients). This will negatively impact Fairmont's ability to grow and expand. The Fairmont program has had to cap growth because of a hiring freeze that has stopped Fairmont's ability to accept new clients because staff are currently working at capacity of unit load despite there currently being the need to serve more clients in South County.

Consolidation Not Needed, Nor Financially Sensible – Program is profitable, at normal scale

- It is not true that financially the only alternative is to shut down services at Highland and merge them with Fairmont. The administration never asked if there was another option.
- The Highland budget can be balanced with a combination of increased volume and decreased staff. Highland IOP staff not needed for day treatment services can be utilized for a planned expansion of outpatient behavioral health services critical for Highland

Wellness, Eastmont Wellness, Alameda Wellness and the Oakland area as well as planned introduction of PES type of services at Highland.

- Fairmont's budget can easily be balanced with a modest increase in volume from 50 patients a day to 60.

Impacts on Staff of the Proposal

- Staff at Fairmont feel strongly that we have created a very high quality program that will be negatively impacted by a consolidation with another program.
- Also, there is great concern among staff that this proposed consolidation will mean staff layoffs.

We ask the Board of Trustees to separate out the proposed integration of our two sites when moving forward the budget proposal before you today and to encourage our leadership to instead invest in the expansion and strengthening of our program to reach its potential both to the citizens of Alameda County and to the profitability of the Health System. We look forward to working closely with the leadership of AHS to realize the full potential of our program on both campuses.

Respectfully,

The Staff of the Intensive Outpatient Behavioral Health Services department

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
DEPARTMENT OF CHEMISTRY
5800 S. UNIVERSITY AVENUE
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60637

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