

9/23/03 New business no. 1

CITY COUNCIL MEETING SEPT 23, 2003

Mr. Mayor, Members of City Council, I am Phillip Bradbury, Chairman of the Alexandria Community Services Board. One of the Board's prime functions is to protect the interests of persons with mental disabilities, including advocacy on their behalf when the occasion demands. I am very appreciative for the opportunity to appear before you and express the Board's deep concern over the announced closure of the in-patient psychiatric unit at Alexandria Hospital on or about January 1, 2004.

The unit is the principal provider of in-patient psychiatric services for Alexandria, and more than 700 consumers are admitted to the unit every year, 80% being Alexandria residents. Closure of the unit will have a very serious detrimental effect on their lives, in ways that may not be immediately apparent.

Consider the need to place a psychiatric patient in hospital under involuntary emergency conditions. This happens in Alexandria about 200 times a year. At present the process is straightforward since Alexandria Hospital usually has beds available. CSB staff evaluate the patient and if hospitalization is required, our staff facilitate this process. If the patient requires involuntary hospitalization, otherwise known as a Temporary Detention Order, Police Department staff must become involved and must stay with the patient until the patient has been checked into the Psychiatric Unit.. This process currently takes about 4-5 hours.

If the patient must go to another hospital, CSB staff and Police staff would need to remain with the patient until the process of locating a bed and transporting the patient is complete. We anticipate that each detention will take at least 8-10 hours each for CSB and Police staff. This is more than double the time it currently requires. All the while, the mentally ill patient is being held in the emergency room. It would be an understatement to say that this is less than ideal for the patient. And, of course, these are among our most vulnerable consumers.

Most alarming is that after speaking with representatives from all surrounding CSB's and many area hospitals, we are very concerned that in many cases, no beds will be available at all and there will be no place for the patient to go.

Assuming however that we were able to locate a bed, our Police staff would then take the patient to the receiving hospital. About 3 days after this happens, a Commitment Hearing must occur. This will require a Sheriff's Deputy to pick the patient up from the hospital, transport them to the hearing at the Alexandria Courthouse, and then transport them to whatever aftercare facility the Judge orders. Sheriff staff estimate that this will take at least 5 hours for every patient.

We have surveyed the other CSB's and hospitals offering psychiatric services in the area and we find that:

- If all our patients were to be accommodated by Mount Vernon and Fairfax Hospitals, Fairfax County CSB would often need to relocate their patients, probably to Prince William County
- Prince William Hospital is frequently filled to capacity, so there would be an overflow, probably to Fredericksburg
- Snowden Hospital in Fredericksburg is usually filled to capacity, particularly in the last few weeks since the announcement of the closure of Culpepper Hospital. The next overflow location is probably Richmond, and as you can see, the problem is cascading through the State and may be exacerbated in the future because Northern Virginia Community Hospital and Dominion Hospital have proposed closing an additional total of 80 beds.

We expressed our concerns in a letter to INOVA management on September 9th. In summary, we asked specific questions relating to the rationale for closure and the credibility of alternative methods of serving

our consumers without erosion of the standard of care. We are meeting with INOVA management in the near future to discuss these concerns.

We are also suggesting a variety of ways in which the unit could remain open, including an offer to manage the unit, at no financial risk to INOVA. In this context, it should be noted that the CSB already provides 4 psychiatrists and 2 therapists free of charge to the hospital. We will continue to explore these possibilities with INOVA management.

The City Council has a direct interest in the outcome of these discussions for three reasons.. First and foremost, closure of this unit represents a significant deterioration in the continuum of care currently provided within our City. Alexandria consumers have been well served by the existing arrangements, and the Council would have an interest in the erosion of the standard of care provided. Secondly, closure of this unit will result in significant cost increases for the City, not only for CSB activities, but also for the Police and the Sheriff' s Office. And lastly, closure of these beds will create a regional bed crisis - there will not be enough beds for those who need care.

The City Manager has proposed that 2 Council members be appointed to work with 2 CSB Board members, with staff support, in pursuing these discussions with INOVA. The CSB enthusiastically endorses the City Manager's proposal, as a constructive step towards ensuring that the interests of our City are protected.

Thus, in conclusion, my purpose in appearing before you tonight is to inform you of the CSB' s serious concerns and to formally request that 2 Council members be designated to work with us as we continue our discussions with INOVA.