



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

HUMAN RIGHTS AUTHORITY-PEORIA REGION

REPORT 17-090-9020
UnityPoint Health – Methodist

INTRODUCTION

The Human Rights Authority (HRA) of the Illinois Guardianship and Advocacy Commission opened an investigation into possible rights violations at Methodist in Peoria. The complaint is that a patient's mail from the Commission was opened by hospital staff, which, if substantiated, would violate protections under the Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities Code (405 ILCS 5).

Methodist is a multi-service hospital that includes a sixty-seven bed psychiatry unit where the patient stayed. The HRA observed the mailroom and interviewed its manager along with the behavioral health director for an idea of typical mail dispensing procedures.

To summarize the complaint, HRA staff sent a confidential letter to the patient and it arrived after her discharge. Someone from behavioral health called the sender to explain the situation and revealed the contents of the envelope.

FINDINGS

The staff we spoke to were unsure of what happened with this patient's letter and how it got to an outpatient program worker who is believed to have opened it. Personal mail is otherwise never opened and only something generic or a piece without an identifier would be. The manager explained that usually they retrieve forwarding addresses after a patient has been discharged, including those of behavioral health patients. There is no formal written policy, but common practice is to put mail in psychiatry's cubicle and someone from that department comes down to get it. Delivery at that point is their responsibility.

According to the director, patient mail arriving on the unit is not opened by the staff and if an item has to be inspected it would be done in the patient's presence. He agreed with the

need to remind all related staff about protected mail and suggested to us that Commission staff write and highlight “confidential” on future mailings.

CONCLUSION

Under the Mental Health Code, “...*all letters addressed by a recipient to the Governor, members of the General Assembly, Attorney General, judges, state’s attorneys, Guardianship and Advocacy Commission or [Equip for Equality], officers of the Department or licensed attorneys at law must be forwarded at once to the person to whom they are addressed without examination by the facility authorities. Letters in reply from the officials and attorneys mentioned above must be delivered to the recipient without examination....*” (405 ILCS 5/2-103c).

A letter from the Commission to a behavioral health patient was opened as acknowledged by a program staff member. A violation is substantiated, and the problem is being remedied. The HRA recommends that administrators reaffirm Section 2-103c with mailroom and behavioral health personnel in writing and to forward future mailings to discharged patients with home addresses.

RESPONSE

Notice: The following page(s) contain the provider response. Due to technical requirements, some provider responses appear verbatim in retyped format.



UnityPoint Health
Methodist | Proctor

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Peoria, Illinois 61636-0002
(309) 672-5522

November 22, 2017

Illinois Guardianship and Advocacy Commission
Peoria Regional Office
401 Main Street – Suite 620
Peoria, IL 61602

Re: HRA #17-090-9020

Dear Ms. Tucker:

Regarding the substantiated finding for the above case related to mail from the Commission to a behavioral health patient, we acknowledge the error in our process and apologize for it. The staff contacted the Commission once they noticed their error. Behavioral Health staff in all of our Behavioral Health areas have received education on the correct procedure should mail be received from any agency outlined in the Mental Health Code. I am attaching a copy of the slide that we used for educational purposes. As we discussed at the site visit, if the Commission can mark the outside of the envelope with a “CONFIDENTIAL” note, this will add a level of protection as well.

Sincerely,

Dean Steiner, LCPC
Director, Behavioral Health Services

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