



Suffolk County Voter

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Wednesday February 15 LWVSC Board Meeting SCCC, Riverhead, 10:00am - 12:00noon

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League Efforts Acknowledged as New Facility for Comprehensive Psychiatric Emergency Program (CPEP) in Stony Brook is Opened

by Katherine Hoak



Through its long-term commitment to Alternatives to Incarceration, the League had become acutely aware of the prevalence of mental illness in Suffolk County and the need for more adequate resources to meet the needs.

The CPEP (Comprehensive Psychiatric Emergency Program) facility at Stony Brook Medical Center was established in 1990 to provide emergency evaluations and triage services for the public mental health system. It accommodated about 6,000 visits a year by people suffering from schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, severe depression, substance abuse, as well as personal and family crises. CPEP is staffed by psychiatrists, social workers, nurses and nursing assistants.

Over two years ago, League members Sondra Irvine, Joyce Rosenthal, Adam Gaus, and I were given a tour of parts of that facility with guidance by Dr. Mark Sedler, Chief Psychiatrist of the Medical Center. Although we were unable to see parts of it because patients were there, what we did see was startling. Areas set aside

It was apparent that patients entering CPEP had little chance for calm or hope, aside from that offered by the caring staff. The environment was ultimately demoralizing.

for incoming patients and for the police officers who needed to accompany some of them were narrow, cramped and stark. In the old facility we saw the small, confining nurses' station with its furniture moved about to make room to move. The rooms for patients were narrow, and yet having to accommodate two patients each. There was little opportunity to provide privacy. It was apparent

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that patients entering CPEP had little chance for calm or hope, aside from that offered by the caring staff. The environment was ultimately demoralizing.

Dr. Sedler's long-term hope had been for new facilities for CPEP at Stony Brook Medical Center. That undertaking would require significant financial commitments, especially from the NYS Office of Mental Hygiene and the SC Legislature, along with that from other resources, including private donors. The League worked to encourage this much-needed support. Through its long-term commitment to Alternatives to Incarceration, the League had become acutely aware of the prevalence of mental illness in Suffolk County and the need for more adequate resources to meet the needs of people suffering with it, especially at CPEP. We wrote articles in the Voter which goes not only to members, but also to County leaders. We made presentations to the Legislature, and when possible, addressed this need when meeting with political leaders. Over the course of at least two years, we did persist!

Commitments were not fast in coming and much work from many quarters was necessary for them finally to come to fruition. The day did come, though, and the building of a state-of-the-art CPEP at Stony Brook has been accomplished!

The League can be proud of its efforts in seeing this state-of-the-art facility, designed to help the most vulnerable among us, come into being.

This new facility would require significant financial commitments, especially from the NYS Office of Mental Hygiene and the SC Legislature, along with that from other resources, including private donors. The League worked to encourage this much-needed support.

I had not been able to attend the ribbon-cutting ceremony in November, but was told that Dr. Sedler acknowledged the importance of the League's efforts in seeing the new CPEP come about. I was recently honored by Dr. Sedler in his giving me a private tour of the facilities, a day before patients were to be moved there from the old facilities. What a surprise they must have felt!

Every room is light and airy. The furnishings are attractive and arranged comfortably, especially in the large room where adult patients and families can congregate. What is particularly lovely there is the aesthetically-designed skylight. Public rooms have large televisions recessed in the walls. The tiles on

each of the bathroom floors, and therefore the bathrooms, are attractive. One bathroom has been set up to make patients with significantly excessive weight to be more comfortable. There is a room set up for patients who become out of control. This room has padded walls. If that is not sufficient and if bed confinement is necessary, there is a television recessed in the ceiling to offer some distraction.

This new CPEP facility is comfortable, aesthetic, and realistic about the needs and behaviors of the population it seeks to serve. The obvious motivation behind its design is to provide comfort, attractiveness, and a safe environment during the assessments patients must undergo during their times of extreme distress. Dr. Sedler essentially did all of the planning for it.

The League can be proud of its efforts in seeing this state-of-the-art facility, designed to help the most vulnerable among us, come into being.



Katherine Hoak is past co-President of the League of Women Voters of Suffolk County. Her thoughtful, well-researched passion for social justice, services for the mentally ill, and alternatives to incarceration have achieved much, and leave us a lasting legacy. Katherine now resides in Becket, MA and continues to be active in League.