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From the Los Angeles Times

## Hospitals to pay \$1.6 million in skid row dumping case

By Cara Mia DiMassa and Richard Winton

12:30 PM PDT, April 8, 2009

Two suburban psychiatric hospitals admitted sending more than 150 patients to fend for themselves on skid row over a two-year period, prosecutors announced today in the largest settlement yet in L.A.'s campaign against patient dumping.

City Attorney Rocky Delgadillo said his office reached the agreement with College Hospital, which runs psychiatric hospitals in Costa Mesa and Cerritos, and which allegedly dumped the patients during 2007 and 2008. Delgadillo said that the hospital would pay \$1.6 million in penalties and charitable contributions to a host of psychiatric and other social service agencies.

It also agreed to establish new protocols for discharging homeless patients with mental disorders and would agree to respect a "no-go zone" similar to a gang injunction, which prohibits gang members from operating in a specific geographical area.

Authorities have alleged that perhaps dozens of hospital have dumped patients on skid row against their will, often people with no insurance and no family to help find them places to live. But until now, the City Attorney's office has followed up on specific cases. In the case of College Hospital, however, prosecutors uncovered a much larger system of sending patients to downtown.

"This is another step toward living up to our name, the city of Angels," said Andy Bales, president of the Union Rescue Mission.

Over the last four years, authorities -- along with many of the service providers in the skid row area -- have cracked down on the practice of dumping people onto the streets of skid row by hospitals and some law enforcement agencies.

The Union Rescue Mission installed "dumping cams" outside its shelter in order to videotape instances of the practice. And the Los Angeles Police Department vowed to arrest anyone dumping patients on skid row, using a law against false imprisonment.

The city attorney's office has also mounted a campaign targeting specific hospitals that it believed was participating in the practice, using a state law concerning unfair business practices, which had been used to prosecute alleged slumlords and which allows a corporation to be sued for unscrupulous behavior, to act against the hospitals.

Two years ago, Kaiser Permanente agreed to a settlement requiring the HMO to establish new discharge rules and provide more training for employees, both of which were aimed at preventing further patient dumping. A retired U.S. District Court judge was assigned to oversee how the hospital chain complied with the rules.

The hospital chain also agreed to about \$500,000 in penalties and financial contributions. That settlement was a model for the College Hospital agreement, said Delgadillo, but the new agreement goes further -- with a larger financial settlement and the added no-go zone.

The \$1.2 million of the College settlement allotted to charitable contributions will go to a number of organizations, including Hathaway-Sycamores Children and Family Services, Lamp community, the Midnight Mission, New Image emergency shelter and the Union Rescue Mission. Delgadillo said that he hoped that the agreement reached with College Hospital would end the practice of dumping. But he said that he had thought the same thing after the city reached a settlement with Kaiser.

"But even after that, it didn't stop," he said. Los Angeles City Councilman Jose Huizar, whose area includes parts of skid row, said it was hard to talk about the practice of dumping without getting angry. "This is not an issue of saying we have more than our fair share in Los Angeles," he said, "or that skid row has more than its fair share. It's about respect for human beings."

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