

PSYCHIATRIC ABUSES IN NEW YORK STATE

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Deaths and Abuse

In a 1997-1998 annual report by the New York State Commission on Quality Care for the Mentally Disabled titled, "Making a Difference in Quality of Life; Ensuring Fiscal Accountability; Protecting From Harm, Advocating for Quality of Life," it was reported that from **July 1, 1996 – June 30, 1997** there were:

- 6,272 reports of suspected adult abuse reviewed
- 260 deaths investigated
- 148 reports of suspected child abuse responded to¹

In its 1998-1999 annual report for **April 1, 1998 – March 31, 1999**, the following was cited:

- 7,556 reports of suspected adult abuse reviewed
- 181 deaths investigated
- 148 reports of suspected child abuse responded to²

In a 2000-2001 annual report titled, "Improving Lives, Protecting Rights," it was reported that from **January 2000 – December 2001** there was a massive increase in the reports of abuse and deaths:

- 17,521 reports of adult abuse reviewed
- 457 deaths investigated
- 415 child abuse investigations³

Between January 2000 and December 2001, 17,521 reports of adult abuse were received and reviewed (132% increase), with 457 deaths investigated (152%) and 415 reports of suspected child abuse (180%).⁴

Crime

- Between 1990 and 2006, 57 psychiatrists, psychologists and psychiatric personnel in New York were convicted of crimes including sexual assault, health insurance fraud, murder, perjury and drug-related offenses. The combined incarceration time was 115 years, plus one life sentence for murder. Fines and restitution totaled more than \$4.2 million.⁵
- On September 21, 2000, David W. Miller, a registered nurse at Rochester Psychiatric Facility, pleaded guilty to attempted first-degree sodomy for attempting to perform oral sex on a patient without her consent. He was sentenced to four years in prison.⁶
- In February 1989, state mental health officials investigated Kingsboro Psychiatric Center in Brooklyn, New York for allegations that adolescents were using abandoned rooms to have sex with each other and to do drugs. Steve Osborne, spokesman for the State Office of Mental Health, which operated Kingsboro and other state mental health centers, said the investigation revealed close to 40 incidents of sex and drug use among the adolescents. Some of the staff that knew about the sexual activities and drug use were suspended from work without pay. Mr. Osborne said, "Obviously supervision was not adequate if this was going on....We found condoms, we found drug paraphernalia—crack and marijuana mostly." Mr. Osborne also said the state mental health department and Kingsboro officials began the investigation on February 7, 1989 after discovering in January 1989 that children between the ages of 5-12 were involved in a "sex club" at the Western New York Children's Psychiatric Center. The investigation of this center revealed 19 incidents of sexual abuse, 15 involving children and four involving three staff members.⁷
- A 1998 study of U.S. Medicaid and Medicare insurance fraud, especially in New York, between 1977 and 1995, showed psychiatry to have the worst track record of all medical disciplines. The study conducted by the U.S. Department of Justice that found that although psychiatrists made up just 8% of all physicians in the United States, they accounted for 18% of the 147 crooked physicians suspended from the Medicare and Medicaid programs over a 15-year period.⁸
- On April 10, 1997, in the Eastern District of New York, a Brooklyn psychologist was convicted of 14 counts of mail fraud and health care fraud for falsely billing Medicare for at least \$1 million of services not rendered between 1991 and 1996. The defendant rarely saw patients or left her home, and she spent most of her time watching television, while submitting bills for thousands of hours of therapy sessions, including sessions on Christmas and New Year's Day 1996, and on the day she was arrested and in custody in the federal courthouse.⁹

- In 1991, the New York State Special Prosecutor for Medicaid Fraud Control announced that Dr. Norman Ackerman (a de-licensed physician) and Dr. Nathaniel Lehrman, operators of the Lenox Psychiatric Clinic in upper Manhattan, were sentenced to prison terms of 5-15 years and 1-3 years, respectively, for stealing more than \$1.3 million from the state Medicaid program. A third defendant, Robert Cohen, the clinic's office manager and receptionist, was previously sentenced to 4-12 years in prison and ordered to pay \$250,000 in restitution for his participation in the theft—the largest Medicaid fraud ever committed by psychiatric providers at that time.¹⁰
- New York Attorney General Eliot Spitzer announced on July 20, 2000, that an undercover investigation by his Medicaid Fraud Control Unit (MFCU) had resulted in the arrest of a Brooklyn psychiatrist for selling drug prescriptions for cash. The payments for the prescriptions ranged from \$80 to \$250 each. According to Deputy Attorney General Jose Maldonado, Director of the Medicaid Fraud Control Unit, Dr. Aleksandr Khaysman was arrested at his medical office. Khaysman sold prescriptions for Xanax and Alprazolam (the generic form of Xanax) to agents. In one instance, Khaysman even accommodated an undercover by selling him a prescription for 60 Xanax pills in the name of another individual.¹¹
- In July 2000, Attorney General Spitzer announced that three Buffalo-area mental health providers had agreed to settle civil settlements, totaling nearly \$3.4 million, for services that the state funded but that the providers could not document as having delivered. According to Deputy Attorney General Jose Maldonado, Director of the Medicaid Fraud Control Unit, as a result of the settlement agreements, the state would receive \$1.7 million from the Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center (NFMMC); \$1 million from the Martha Beeman Foundation, Inc., Niagara Falls; and \$196,996 from Lakeshore Behavioral Health, Inc., Buffalo.¹²
- On October 4, 2000, a Washington Heights psychiatrist Dr. Ileana Redondo pled guilty to grand larceny in the second degree, admitting to stealing \$60,000 from taxpayers by inflating the amount of time she spent treating Medicaid patients. During 1997 and 1998, Dr. Redondo submitted nearly 1,000 false reimbursement claims stating that she had provided psychotherapy sessions to Medicaid recipients of much longer duration than actually provided. Spitzer said, "This investigation and prosecution by my Medicaid Fraud Control Unit drives home our message to doctors: If you are stealing from state taxpayers, we will find you and prosecute you to the fullest extent of the law."¹³
- Attorney General Spitzer announced on April 9, 2001 that a diagnostic and treatment center had admitted to stealing \$350,000 from taxpayers by fraudulently

billing for outpatient psychological counseling services provided to Medicaid patients. They billed for psychological counseling services provided to patients referred to the center by their personal physicians. In fact, no referrals had been made and, as a result, the Comprehensive Clinical Center (CCC) received \$350,000 in Medicaid funds to which it was not entitled.¹⁴

- In May 2001, New York psychologist Ronald Katz pleaded guilty to fraudulently billing the Medicaid program for psychotherapy sessions that never took place. In one instance, the psychologist saw an undercover agent, posing as a Medicaid recipient, for only two sessions yet billed the State for 42 sessions at \$36 per visit. As part of his plea, Dr. Katz will make restitution of \$127,000 to the Medicaid program. He was sentenced to a conditional discharge.¹⁵
- In September 2001, Attorney General Spitzer charged Brooklyn psychiatrist Dr. Dana Natalia Glicklich with stealing nearly \$100,000 from taxpayers by inflating the amount of time she spent with Medicaid patients. In some cases, the billings were for days when the doctor was on vacation or out of the office. "The defendant only worked three to five hours, one day a week, at this Brooklyn health center, yet billed the State for more than \$1,000 a day for having provided individual psychotherapy sessions of up to an hour for as many as twenty patients during this short period of time," said Spitzer. In 2002 she was sentenced to five years probation and ordered to pay \$70,000 in restitution.¹⁶
- In November 2001, Attorney General Spitzer announced that a Harlem psychiatrist had been charged with stealing more than \$50,000 from taxpayers by allowing one of his patients, a Medicaid recipient, to treat patients. The patient was also charged in the theft. Dr. John Bolling was charged with Grand Larceny in the Second Degree, Falsifying Business Records in the First Degree, and Offering a False Instrument For Filing in the First Degree. According to prosecutors, in carrying out a five-year scheme, Dr. Bolling allowed Westry, an unlicensed counselor and Medicaid recipient, to treat patients. Dr. Bolling then billed the Medicaid program as if he, himself, had provided the psychotherapy sessions. Further, Dr. Bolling defrauded Medicaid by inflating the amount of time he actually spent treating patients and by billing for many "phantom" patient sessions that never took place. He was sentenced to five years probation and ordered to pay \$184,000 in restitution.¹⁷
- In May 2002, psychiatrist Bruce M. Forester, 52, of Bronxville, NY, was arrested and charged with health care fraud. The arrest was the result of a joint investigation by the Insurance Department Frauds Bureau, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District. Forester overbilled Fortis

Insurance Company for treatments said to have occurred up to six sessions a week, when treatments really only occurred two or three times weekly. Additionally, Forester fraudulently billed for non-existent treatments that would have occurred after the patient ended the professional relationship. The fraudulent submission of claims totaled approximately \$60,000. According to a release issued by the office of Superintendent of Insurance Gregory V. Serio, New York was aggressive in its fight against insurance fraud. Forester was sentenced on March 28, 2003 to one month in prison, five months home confinement, two years supervised release and a \$10,000 fine.¹⁸

- In July 2002, two former officials at a Homecrest-based mental health agency were charged for luring elderly Soviet immigrants to their clinic with free English lessons and a promise of U.S. citizenship waivers, bilking Medicaid of more than \$9 million. Herbert Sklar, executive director of the New Hope Guild (NHG), and Eugene Margulis, director of the NHG Russian program, were charged Thursday with billing Medicaid for tens of thousands of unauthorized psychotherapy sessions performed by unlicensed therapists. "Instead of providing legitimate health care, the defendants took advantage of not only a government-assistance program but a newly arrived population to raid the public treasury," said Attorney General Spitzer. He added, "In its last full year of operation, this was the single largest Medicaid provider of outpatient mental-health services in the state."¹⁹
- In August 2003, law-enforcement officials cracked an insurance-fraud ring that staged thousands of car accidents and then employed its own network of doctors, including psychiatrists and fake medical clinics, to bilk an insurance company out of \$48 million. A grand jury on Long Island issued 567 indictments, 86 of which were made public at a news conference. Suffolk County district attorney, Thomas J. Spota, said the ring used "runners" and "crash dummies" in cars that would cut in front of other cars, often driven by women with children or by elderly people, slam on the brakes, and cause a crash.²⁰
- In 2003, Oxford Health Plans, Inc. reviewed behavioral health claims in the New York area that it said was meant to prevent and eliminate fraud, but the move sparked an outcry by providers. The company said it identified about 300 professionals whose notes on behavioral treatment weren't detailed or long enough. The company says it would "continue to pursue those few providers who have engaged in fraudulent billing, unlicensed care or other issues unrelated to documentation."²¹
- In 2004, Attorney General Spitzer announced that a Nanuet psychiatrist was charged with defrauding government insurers of more than \$1 million by billing for services

never rendered. Dr. Justin Psaila was arraigned before Rockland County Court Judge Kenneth Resnick on a 23-count indictment. Between January 1997 and November 2002, Dr. Psaila, submitted thousands of false reimbursement claims stating that he had provided Medicaid and Medicare patients with various medical and psychiatric services, including psychiatric therapy with at least 37 minutes of face-to-face contact, when, as Dr. Psaila knew, the services had not been rendered.²²

- In March 2005, a Long Island psychiatrist was charged with insurance fraud after billing a “patient” for 30 sessions that were all in the therapist's head—because he never actually met the person, authorities said. Melvon Swanston, 58, of Baldwin, NY, kept detailed records of the imaginary symptoms, treatment and progress of the man—whom he claimed to have treated for a full five months. The patient was a real person: a Long Island man who was in a car accident in 2003. The patient went to Liberty Medical facility and received acupuncture, chiropractic treatment and therapy, but no psychiatric care. Swanston, who worked at the same facility, but never treated the man, billed \$3,677 for the phony sessions.²³

Abuse

- In the state of New York, an estimated 7,000 people receive electroshock treatment annually, frequently against their will. Court-ordered electroshock treatment increased 73% in New York state psychiatric hospitals between 1999 and 2001. Damage from electroshock treatment includes permanent memory loss, brain damage, depression and death.²⁴
- Of the 135,000 psychiatric emergency visits per year in New York State, an average of 8.5% of the patients were put in mechanical restraints placing them at risk of injury and/or death. In one 10-year period (approximately 1984 to 1994) there were 111 fatalities in New York facilities due to restraints.²⁵
- Abuses and fatalities from psychiatric restraints continued in New York despite 1999 federal regulations against coercive and abusive use of restraints. According to a May 2003 report by the New York State Commission on Quality of Care and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities*, they are called upon to investigate restraint related patient deaths every four months. The Commission had just completed an investigation into the restraint death of 42-year-old Neil Larkin who was asphyxiated after being placed face down during a restraint episode in a psychiatric residential center.²⁶
- In the fiscal year 2000-2001, the New York State Commission on Quality of Care received 8,794 reports of psychiatric abuse and neglect of patients. 212 of these were episodes of abuse involving seclusion and restraints and 5,045 complaints were for physical abuse and neglect.²⁷
- In January 2004, Robert Lee Marion was awarded nearly \$1 million by a New York jury who found that he had been illegally deprived of his freedom when he was involuntarily committed to Bellevue Hospital. Marion had gone to the emergency room seeking a minor surgery for a diabetic condition. Upon being told he was not scheduled for any operation that day, he became upset. Instead of being asked to leave, he was transferred to the psychiatric unit where psychiatrists prescribed Haldol and Ativan and placed him on a stretcher with waist support. Psychiatrists claimed he was a danger to himself, essentially based on his being incomprehensible and pointing his finger at them. One psychiatrist claimed, "He can get into

• **The New York State Commission on Quality of Care and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities** is an independent, New York State government agency whose aim is to improve the quality of life for New Yorkers with disabilities and protect their rights by providing investigations and advocacy services, promoting the inclusion of people with disabilities in all aspects of community life.

situations that could easily provoke others and get [himself] hurt. He also has grossly impaired judgment now.” The appeal judge rejected this, stating: “A rational jury could find that this explanation was flimsy and speculative.” Further, “The intake records repeatedly recorded that Marion showed no evidence of suicidal ideation or aggressive ideation. Only Dr. Nadrich wrote anything about dangerousness, and what he wrote was speculative and unimpressive. Dr. Stastny testified that both men failed to ask questions designed to discern whether Marion had any intention or likelihood for causing physical harm.” When one of the admitting psychiatrists was asked to explain to a jury how he came to the determination that Marion was dangerous, the psychiatrist answered, “[T]he patient is exhibiting behavior that's consistent with danger, and so, his body language is telling me the answer to that question, which is he's dangerous.” The judge also rejected this, stating, “The jury could rationally find that there was no clear documentation or testimony about such ‘body language,’ and that Marion, albeit psychotic, was not dangerous. The jury could rationally choose to agree with plaintiff's expert that finger pointing was not a threat.” Marion ended up being held against his will for six days. His attorney argued that while he may have been acting in an upset manner, his behavior did not cross the line into a criminal act, and certainly did not warrant commitment. This was a landmark ruling against psychiatric involuntary commitment, and, in the words of his attorney, the victory was “about...the freedom to have one’s thoughts, no matter how off-beat or off-center or...even radical, without being labeled mentally ill...and then being shuttled off to a psychiatric hospital.” As the jury had not been advised on how to determine the compensation, the amount awarded was later reduced to \$180,000.²⁸

- A *New York Times* investigation in 2002 of group homes (in the community) for the mentally disturbed revealed that hundreds were subjected to abuses. Between 1995 and 2001, 946 people died in these group homes. Some residents died roasting in their rooms during heat waves. Others threw themselves from rooftops, making up some of at least 14 suicides in that seven-year period. Still more, lacking the most basic care, succumbed to routinely treatable ailments, from burst appendixes to seizures.²⁹
- More than 6 million American children are prescribed powerful stimulants, antidepressants and other psychotropic drugs for so-called educational and behavioral problems that have no medical or scientific evidence to substantiate them.³⁰ In New York, Mrs. Patricia Weathers, filed a lawsuit after school psychologists and psychiatrists coerced her to drug her then 8-year-old son Michael. On the psychiatric drugs, Michael became withdrawn, could not eat or sleep and ran away from home. Recognizing that these problems started with the stimulants and then the antidepressant Paxil, under medical advice, Mrs. Weathers gradually

withdrew her son from the drugs. Medical tests showed that he suffered from allergies and anemia, and when treated, his behavior problems disappeared. He is now drug-free and doing well.³¹

- Following an August 2002 *New York Post* front page article on Patricia Weathers story, over 65 parents came forward to describe their own personal stories of coercion and intimidation used by school districts to strong arm them into drugging their children.³² Parents were coerced in towns ranging from Buffalo to New York City.³³
- On June 3, 2004, Attorney General Spitzer filed suit against a pharmaceutical manufacturer alleging the company had suppressed negative clinical study data that the company's antidepressant, Paxil, was harmful to children. On August 26, 2004, the manufacturer paid \$2.5 million to the state of New York, agreeing to post all clinical trial data on its drugs by the end of 2005.³⁴

Psychiatric Escapees Causing Harm

- In January 1995, Rueben Harris was accused of killing a woman by pushing her in front of a subway car in New York City. Harris had escaped from Manhattan Psychiatric Center on Wards Island on December 24th, 1994. Staff had given him the privilege to walk freely to his rehabilitation program unescorted, despite a 20-year history of violence. Dr. Feig, the executive deputy commissioner on mental health said, "He had the freedom to go from his locked ward to his rehabilitation program unescorted, and he should not have."³⁵
- In April 1993, Angel Coro disappeared from the Rochester Psychiatric Center after being given permission to make brief trips off the center's grounds, despite a long history of criminal activity. After he escaped he stabbed a 6-year-old girl with a hypodermic needle on a subway train in New York City. Originally, he was sent to the Rochester Psychiatric Center in 1987 after being labeled unfit to stand trial for burglary.³⁶
- In October 1991, Ghana Frazier, a 32-year-old man with a violent history who had twice escaped from a Bronx mental hospital, stabbed his father to death. Frazier was given permission to walk the grounds of the facility, a bonus for "making good progress" and he escaped. After the murder he turned himself into the police. Frazier was originally hospitalized in 1981 for dropping his 18-month-old nephew from a fifth floor window. The hospital spokesperson said, "People do escape....We don't run prisons. We run hospitals."³⁷

Experiments

- In 1999, the *New York Post* exposed how National Institute of Mental Health partially funded research which 16-year-old Maria will never forget. Researchers "put a clear cube around my head, tied around my neck," she said of her ordeal at the New York Psychiatric Institute (NYPI). Then they pumped carbon dioxide (CO₂) into the cube. Maria would later write: "I had an oxygen tube in my nose....The test was supposed to last for 40 minutes. I could only take it for 20 minutes....I started to cry....After the CO₂ test, they said yes, I was depressed." More than 120 other children and teenagers aged between 7 and 18 were subjected to the same experiment.³⁸
- During the same period, NYPI performed little known but extensive drug experiments on troubled kids as young as 6 years old, and failed to tell the children and their parents about serious risks associated with the drug. This included heightened suicidal thoughts, violent behavior and wild manic episodes. The *Post* received 2,500 pages of documents from the Office of Mental Health detailing their experiments. They found that "painful and debilitating spinal taps are being performed on seriously depressed youngsters" and "a potentially harmful—and sometimes fatal—drug that causes painful side effects is being given to kids and adults with volatile behavior problems."³⁹

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