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## Living

# State officials want reports on former mental health patients

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By Joe Fahy, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Following the recent death of a former Mayview State Hospital patient who plunged from the Birmingham Bridge, the state is taking steps to ensure that providers of community mental health services promptly report serious events involving former patients.

Some providers seemed unclear about "sentinel events," including unexplained deaths, severe injury or involvement in a serious crime, that are to be reported immediately, said Joan Erney, deputy secretary of the state Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services.

State officials plan to arrange training to ensure "everyone is clear about our expectation," Ms. Erney said this week.

The state also plans to work with officials at a specific local agency to "shore up their documentation process" when a patient leaves the facility, she said. She declined to identify the agency.

Ms. Erney said officials also want to ensure appropriate monitoring of patients who may move from one community program to another.

While some patients may improve and become more independent, "we still have to be there for them," she said.

Mary Fleming, executive director of Allegheny HealthChoices, which is developing a plan to improve behavioral health care in the five counties served by Mayview, noted that community mental health agencies also report issues that could lead to more serious health problems, like patients who refuse to take their medications. Those reports have helped patients avoid hospitalizations or mental health crises, she said.

But for sentinel events, the state appears to want "more information more quickly," she said.

Ms. Erney said the state is taking the actions after completing one of three reviews of recent sentinel events involving former Mayview patients in Allegheny County.

Two involved deaths of former patients, she said, and the other involved a former patient who was arrested.

Ms. Erney said the other reviews should be completed later this month. More recommendations for change could be made once those reviews are completed, she said.

She said that so far, the reviews have not indicated problems with the Mayview discharge process.

For that reason, discharges from Mayview were resumed last month, she said. They were suspended for about two weeks while reviews were under way.

Downsizing of the hospital has been proceeding for months, and the state plans to close the facility at the end of next year. The state also wants to close a Mayview forensic unit, used to evaluate and treat people in the criminal justice system, and provide those services at other locations around the state.

More than 90 non-forensic patients have been discharged from Mayview since 2005, Ms. Erney said.

While she declined to comment on specific cases, the state temporarily halted downsizing of the hospital after the death of Anthony Fallert, who had schizophrenia. Authorities believe he walked away from a community mental health program operated by Mercy Behavioral Health on the South Side on Oct. 29 and jumped or fell from the Birmingham Bridge.

Police said the program did not report him missing until the next day, his 24th birthday. His body was pulled from the Monongahela River Nov. 5. The Allegheny County medical examiner's office said the cause of death was drowning.

Officials said he was released from Mayview last year. Since then, he had also lived at facilities in Clarion County and New Kensington and at his mother's home in Allentown, his family said.

The same day Mr. Fallert's body was found in the river, another ex-patient, Ahson J. Abdullah, 58, was fatally injured when he was struck by a train near his home in Braddock. He had been a patient in Mayview's forensic unit.

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