

John Rogowski, MD
Conway Emergency Group
300 Singleton Ridge Rd
Conway SC, 29526

October 1, 2016

The Honorable Nikki Haley
Office of the Governor
1205 Pendleton Street
Columbia SC, 29201

Dear Governor,

I am writing to share another episode of violence that occurred at our community hospital. Working in an emergency department it is accepted that violence can occur due to the behavior of the public during their times of stress. However in addition to serving the emergency needs of the community, hospitals throughout the state are being asked to serve as holding wards for patients whom are committed by the state psychiatrists. This is due to there not being enough beds available at the state psychiatric hospitals. Conway Medical Center is often required to hold mental health patients whom are committed by the psychiatrists at Waccamaw Mental Health as they await an available bed.

The concern is twofold. One is that people whom are deemed by a psychiatrist to be at risk are then expected to await transfer at a community hospital which does not have mental health capabilities. This proves to be harmful as the ill person while waiting transfer is not receiving mental health care. The second concern is that this ill person, whom is often frustrated and scared, can pose a threat to others. In a community emergency department the facilities are small, and these mentally ill persons are held within close proximity to other patients. When these mentally ill persons act out, there is a risk of harm to staff, other patients, and accompanying family members.

On September 30th Conway Medical Center had another unfortunate occurrence. A brief summation of the event is that an ill person whom had refused his mental care threatened to kill his family members. This person was picked up by officers, seen at Waccamah Mental Health, and deemed to

be a threat to others due to his untreated Schizoaffective disorder. The psychiatrist committed the patient and the staff attempted to transfer the patient to a state hospital. Apparently due to the threat of violence, and his exceedingly large size, multiple hospitals refused to accept the person. I am told that these hospitals included McLeod, Low County Transitions, and Aurora. Other hospitals such as MUSC simply reported that they did not have available beds. The one hospital that was capable to manage this person's violent tendencies is Bryant Hospital, whom noted that they too had no bed available. At the end of the business day this patient whom was deemed too dangerous for multiple psychiatric hospitals, and had threatened to kill family members, was brought by a deputy to our community emergency department to await a bed opening. There was no recommendation for mental health care, and this poor soul deemed too dangerous for the community, with uncontrolled Schizoaffective disorder, was required to patiently wait. As you can imagine, this did not go well.

I saw this person when he arrived to the department on September 28th. I write this on the evening of September 30th noting that the events that transpired over these days included his destruction of the room facilities, police involvement to the point where they had to call Horry County Hostage Rescue to "talk him down," the patient attacking a hospital employee requiring 8 persons to restrain him, and finally a police arrest.

Perhaps there was some elaboration of the story that I was told upon my arrival this evening. However these facts I am sure. Our community medical center is repeatedly being asked to hold mentally ill persons committed by state psychiatrists as there are not enough mental health beds available. Today a hospital employee was assaulted. Tomorrow it may be another patient or a family member. Emergency Departments are not meant to be holding facilities due to the fact that the state does not provide the necessary resources to the state mental health hospitals. The costs involved with having these persons sitting in community hospital emergency departments, and in this case the county jail, seems to be more then the costs to provide more desperately needed mental health beds.

Sincerely yours,

John Rogowski, MD

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'JR' or similar initials, written in a cursive style.