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DRVT Press Release on Psychiatric Inpatient Timely Discharge Initiative

Twenty years ago the U.S. Supreme Court issued the landmark decision in *Olmstead v. L.C.* affirming that people with disabilities have a right to live in the most integrated setting appropriate to their needs, and that to prevent such integration is a violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Yet still today, many Vermonters with disabilities are harmed by being held in hospitals, especially psychiatric units, long after their doctors say it is safe and appropriate for them to be discharged. Prolonged institutionalization in a hospital is not helpful – it is an enormous expense and requires hospital space that could be used by someone with more-acute needs.

Children in Emergency Departments wait an average of 3 days for a psychiatric inpatient bed.¹ Delayed discharge of patients from psychiatric units at the University of Vermont Medical Center alone resulted in about 57 patients per year that were not able to get a hospital bed when needed.² In April 2019, Vermont Public Radio reported that wait times and barriers for seniors in Vermont to get into nursing homes is worse than the national average.³

Over the next several months Disability Rights Vermont (DRVT), Vermont’s Mental Health Care Ombudsman and federally funded Protection and Advocacy System, will be reaching out to identify people who are ready to leave the hospital, but cannot because there is no appropriately supportive placement available. While doing this fact-finding, DRVT staff will inform patients, family and facility staff about the rights of people with disabilities to be free from unnecessary institutionalization, and inform them how to pursue vindication of those rights.

DRVT expects to report our findings and recommendations, and to pursue further systemic remedies if the structural obstacles and impediments to timely reintegration are not addressed.

If you have information about a person with a disability unnecessarily detained in an inpatient hospital unit due to lack of adequate community resources, please contact DRVT at AJ@DisabilityRightsVt.org, by phone at 802-229-1355 x.103, or by mail at DRVT, 141 Main St. Ste. 7, Montpelier, VT 05602.

¹ <https://www.wcax.com/content/news/Kids-in-Crisis-Children-left-waiting-in-ERs-for-care-511906771.html>

² https://mentalhealth.vermont.gov/sites/mhnew/files/documents/News/82/Inpatient_Psychiatry_Barrier_Days_Analysis.pdf

³ <https://www.vpr.org/post/dementia-patients-wait-months-long-term-care-vermont-hospitals#stream/0>