

1995-96 Grand Jury Response
Mental Health Client Representative
September 9, 1996
Randall Feltman, Health Care Agency

The Mental Health Department appreciates the important role of our 1995-96 Grand Jury and the attention and effort invested in the mental health area. We always cooperate fully and assist in any way requested. The investigation referred to in this chapter of the final report was generated by a citizens complaint focused on the procedures employed by mental health staff related to housing funds for persons with severe mental illness. The complaint alleged that mental health staff were providing limited housing assistance funds to patients who had large unspent balances in Social Security Disability accounts under the auspices of the Public Guardian's Office.

The Grand Jury did a thorough job of investigation and the department will benefit from their work and findings. The specific complaint was not substantiated since no clients with large Social Security balances were identified as receiving housing assistance funds. However, the review revealed that the policy and procedures to grant this assistance were inconsistent across the ten adult teams in the County and errors such as was alleged could occur. Therefore, the Department has added an additional review and approval step by the Team Supervisor to ensure that the housing assistance is essential and that no other personal funds are available to that patient. Also, all reimbursements and waivers of reimbursements will receive a central review and approval by fiscal staff. We agree with the Grand Jury that this additional procedure is appropriate and will be beneficial. It will not reduce the availability of vital housing funds to needy patients.

The Department also agrees with the Grand Jury that there needs to be closer communication between the Mental Health staff and Public Guardian's staff to remain current on Conservatee financial balances. We have requested and are receiving regular information of all accounts of Mental Health clients and will monitor those balances closely, both at the central administrative level and at the home team of that client. We believe the transfer of client account information from the Public Guardian's Office to the Behavioral Health Department is a shared responsibility and will work this coming year to ensure necessary communication in this area.

The Auditor Controller's audit of rent reimbursements for SIL Homes and the first month in a Board and Care Home did not identify any patients capable of reimbursing the County who did not. In fact, the data on reimbursements indicated staff were doing a conscientious and effective job of gaining all possible reimbursements. This financial assistance is cost effective even though some clients cannot reimburse the county for these expenses. This special client population receiving assistance are not employed, usually have no funds, and are in a severe crisis. It is in the county's financial interest to place them in these low cost housing options to diffuse the crisis and avoid a much more expensive hospitalization or confrontation with law enforcement. We will continue to seek all possible and appropriate reimbursements from clients.

The Department appreciates the commendation for our prompt attention to this matter and responsiveness to the Auditor-Controllers recommendations. The Department will monitor the administration of all housing funds and the implementation of these recommended policy and procedure changes closely during the year.