

MERCY BUSINESS HEALTH SERVICES

4
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Woodbury County Jail Nurses

Issues we would like to address with Board members

Lack of adequate hours - currently contracted to provide 104 hours per week with 2.5 nurses doing the work. This has not changed for over 10 years and the acuity of the inmates has doubled.

Our nurses put in over 40 hours of overtime last two weeks. This is not good nursing practice and jeopardizes both inmate care and the wellbeing of the nurse. - Many days are without meal breaks. The overtime continues to mount. They have to set up medications for over 70 plus inmates at one time. The diagnosis for some of these inmates can range from uncontrolled diabetes, suicidal ideation, mental disorders, heart disease- dialysis, infections, broken bones, inmates going through detox, MRSA (infectious disease requiring isolation and medications) All of these various medications and treatments require a physician's order. This means the nurses have to get releases signed and then call the last provider to make sure there is an order documented and current. This takes many phone calls and waiting since most providers cannot be reached in one phone call. With Federal prisoners the nurse has to call out of the area jails or physicians that are out of town. Many of the medications are outdated and either have to be renewed or discontinued. A very long tedious task. Keep in mind for the majority of the time only one nurse is on at a time so the medication orders on one inmate can take a whole shift to get resolved. The inmates on medications need vitals taken and documented - we have to follow nursing practice as all of the nurses are RNs per the Iowa licensing Board. Any lesser licenses is not allowed to practice alone in a Jail in Iowa such as -LPN, CNA or EMT. There is no time for medical assessments on all inmates coming in to the Jail - only those who have medications. All medications coming in to the Jail in paper bags and other containers have to be checked and evaluated for authenticity.

Our nurses, as employees of Mercy Medical Center and our Medical Director, Dr Rodney Cassens are all concerned about liability issues with this type of high acuity work being expected out of the current nurses. We were hopeful more hours would be approved earlier this year but the Board denied additional hours. This leaves us with little choice but to discontinue our contract if we do not have a better contractual arrangement for additional hours. We do not believe another hospital or private provider would do this type of work either with so few staff and few hours allotted for this type of care. As far as liability goes, we cannot afford to continue putting in so many hours of overtime with the same nurses. They all have license to uphold and have worked very hard to maintain them. I would invite anyone to follow the nurses around for one shift to better understand the work load. Our nurses love

their work at the Jail and appreciate the support they have received from the Jail staff. There is only so much the officers can do as many of these things require nursing licenses in order to provide the appropriate level of care.

We do have a provider that also visits one time per week to see inmates in person and also there is a provider from Siouxland Mental Health that comes each Friday. Many additional orders are given at that time- all new medication orders need to be ordered from Drilling and then a med card created and then the medications have to be set up appropriately with regard to allergies and medication reactions. It is not simply giving a pill and walking away. A lot of observation and follow-up is required per inmate safety regulations and nursing practice. Our nurse's work under approved Medical policies and procedures signed off by our provider. Our Mercy Lab has to approve all laboratory procedures being done at the Jail and are annually checked by Mercy Lab personnel visiting the Jail. Since there are Lab procedures being performed by the nurses at the Jail there has to be a State approved CLIA certificate applied for and kept up- your Jail was inspected by the State a couple of years ago and received high marks. Without the nurses this would not have been possible- everything medical is maintained through your contract with Mercy. We have assumed this liability for years but in the last year the acuity has risen and the inmates being taken in are on numerous medications. It simply cannot go on the way it is now without further consideration for additional nursing hours.

Mercy is now and has always has provided top notch care when the nurse is there but we are leaving many hours uncovered and creating undo stress and unsafe working conditions when the nurse puts in so much overtime.

In the past year they have been asked to give meds through IV lines, maintain the health of inmates requiring dialysis, having severe heart disease and risk of heart failure, inmates that are paraplegic, inmates going through detox and many other difficult medical conditions requiring their expertise and careful documentation on each inmate receiving any type of nursing care. Many inmates have not taken their medications for years, have abused drugs and alcohol and now they expect and laws require we give their medications. Side effects need to be watched for closely. Vitals need to be taken regularly and documentation has to be accurate and regular. The officers are put in to an unsafe situation as well. When the nurses leave they then become responsible for the inmates health and possible complications. It is just not a good situation all round.

We would appreciate the Board's questions and a tour we feel, is essential for at least two shifts- evening and day for better understanding. The nurse's station is small and many would believe, inadequate for providing good nursing care. We hope this will help us all as we become more transparent in our needs and your needs for the Jail inmate population.