

The Challenges of Caring for Elderly and Medically Fragile Patients with Serious Mental Illness

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Daniel Lance, PsyD
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Level

Intermediate

Room

Track

Clinical/Legal/Policy, Administration & Legislation

CE

CPA/BBS/CJER/MCLE

Bio

Christy Mulkerin, MD is a physician with 9 years of experience in correctional medicine and overseeing the care of patients with serious mental illness in locked facilities. In her current role with DSH, she directs the medical and dental care provided in the five state hospitals, addressing issues such as the management of chronic disease, emergency care, specialty care, metabolic syndrome, and patient deaths. This last year, Christy co-led an Aging and Medically Fragile Task Force within DSH, focusing on the issues and proposed solutions of the most vulnerable patients within the DSH system.

Ambar Faizi, DO is a forensic and clinical psychiatrist who has been working with individuals with severe mental illness (SMI) since 2015 and joined DSH in 2023. Ambar's role as Assistant Medical Director for patients found Incompetent to Stand Trial places her at the intersection between jails, community mental health treatment, and the state hospital system. In her role, she supports DSH programs in less restrictive community-based mental health treatment settings, such as jails, county behavioral health programs, and Community Inpatient Facilities (CIF). She also focuses on educating providers on caring for the seriously mentally ill (SMI) population via SMICalAdviser, an online learning platform created specifically for patients with SMI in California.

Daniel Lance, PsyD is a forensic psychologist with fourteen years of experience in the field, both in California and Colorado. He has worked with patients with SMI in DSH Jail Based Competency Treatment (JBCT) Programs and Conditional Release Programs (CONREP) since 2011, where he conducted assessments to determine eligibility, coordinated admissions and discharges, provided treatment, supervised patients in the community, conducted risk assessments, and more. Currently, he oversees CONREP services in California, supervising the psychologists and program liaisons statewide, managing an increase in census, developing policy, and providing testimony.

Shelley Muzio, JD is an Assistant Chief Counsel with DSH. Shelley specializes in obtaining and enforcing involuntary medication orders, coordinating with community partners including courts and judges, navigating medical probate for DSH patients, advising on movement of patients

between the community and hospitals, and guiding clinicians on finding an appropriate level of placement for patients with serious mental illness.

Narrative

California's aging population is increasing, and patients with serious mental illness are no exception. Clinical experts from the California Department of State Hospitals (DSH) discuss the challenges in caring for elderly and medically fragile patients in the hospitals and in community programs. DSH has tackled this complicated issue by compiling data and creating solutions for systemwide change that align with the Governor's Master Plan on Aging. A legal expert will discuss the different types of forensic commitments patients fall under, and the discharge challenges associated with each, including proposed legislative changes to facilitate the transition to the community.

Learning Objectives

1. Identify three specific challenges related to caring for elderly and medically fragile patients with serious mental illness in California
2. Describe two community treatment programs for patients with serious mental illness and the options for caring for patients who are elderly or medically fragile
3. Differentiate between different three types of forensic commitments for patients in the state hospital systems and the community transition options for each