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DAVID HICKS
Chairperson

Commission on Disabilities Minutes
June 13, 2011

Present: Cecile Brodsky, Dana Canevari, David Hicks, William Long, Elaine Quinn
Matthew Ranelli, Jack Tsai

Excused Absence: Jason Gomez

Staff: Michelle Duprey, Paula Pernal

Meeting was called to order at 5:35pm.

Guest Speaker

Michael J. Sernyak, MD, CEO, Connecticut Mental Health Center (CMHC), Professor of Psychiatry, Yale School of Medicine

Dr. Sernyak states that CMHC was founded in 1966 and is run by Yale for the Dept. of Mental Health & Addiction Services by state statute by a member of the department-the CEO which is the position he currently holds. He discusses that the target population is individuals with serious mental illness such as schizophrenia and post-traumatic stress disorders from the community. There is a walk-in clinic and they serve about 5000 people. CMHC is located at 34 Park Street. The new initiative is medical illnesses that have a relationship with mental health.

Dana asks Dr. Sernyak about the relationship with diet and mental health. Dr. Sernyak mentioned that CMHC has partnered with City Seed every Friday as part of a wellness program. Dana also discussed the benefits of alternative medicine such as yoga and meditation on mental health. Dr. Sernyak agrees with Dana. He states that he has inquired about the uses of alternative medicine and exercise.

Michelle asks Dr. Sernyak if he has worked with the Department of Community Services. He responds in the negative. Michelle will contact him with lower level department staff.

Elaine mentions that exercise has a great impact on the amount of medication that an individual will require. Dr. Sernyak agrees.

William asks how many citizens are not being served in the community. Dr. Sernyak guesses that 10% of the population in New Haven has mental illness. With about 30,000 in the region, the population they serve is much lower than that number. Dr. Sernyak states that there is a huge overlap with the homeless population as well as the prison population. He states that these individuals are not getting the mental health care that they require.

Michelle asks about dealing with individuals with mental health issues who have repeatedly contacted the police without justification and now have contacted her office. Dr. Sernyak suggests contacting him directly to troubleshoot or convene a working group to assist.

Elaine suggests that Dr. Sernyak discuss CMHC as a coordinating role as opposed to a mini-hospital. Dr. Sernyak states that Community Services Network is a group of 17 community providers. Dr. Sernyak says that this network distributes money from the Dept. of Mental Health & Addiction Services to these community providers such as Yale New Haven Hospital. These programs are very entrepreneurial. They provide housing, therapy, and other innovative programs.

Michelle asks if there is a Patient & Family Advisory Board. Dr. Sernyak states that there is an Advisory Board set by state statute. Dr. Sernyak is working on developing a Patient & Family Advisory Board.

David asks if Dr. Sernyak if he recognizes that psychiatry has moved away from traditional work toward medical work. Dr. Sernyak responds that over time there has been a growth toward the use of medicine. Dr. Sernyak mentions that many medications originally prescribed for other uses be used for mental illnesses.

Matt asks about the priority of a group such as this Commission. Dr. Sernyak states that interfacing and stigma are the most important.

Dr. Sernyak states that he hopes to interface more with the community, the City of New Haven, and his patients. His goals include interface, stigma, projects, and problem-solve.

May minutes were reviewed. Moved to accept by Dana, seconded by Matt. Approved unanimously.

Chairman's Report

David has been working on disability issues that affected by bills before the State legislature and the Federal government. He recommends that everyone get involved either as a Commission member or a private citizen. David states he worked a little with Elaine to have Dr. Sernyak attend. David states that he worked with Dana on the Faun Project.

Department Report

Michelle discusses the taxi issue-waiting for decision from State of CT for approval of permits for additional taxis.

Elaine inquires about the Route 34 Project and the Department's involvement. Michelle is on a Site-Plan Review Committee, but not a part of the community meetings. Elaine plans to attend the neighborhood meeting for self-interest.

Next month there will be a Guest Speaker to discuss Arts for Youth Program.

Elaine mentions Advocacy Training being offered in Hartford.

Old Business

Dana states that David and she previously discussed the possibility that Patrick Kennedy could be a part of the Faun Project. Dana states that she is having difficulty getting in touch with Patrick Kennedy. Dana asks for suggestions. Elaine mentions that he received an award from Yale and that his brother lives in Branford. Elaine suggests contacting Dr. John Krystal.

Elaine mentions that the Hill House Opera is performing 4-one Act Plays this Saturday at 2:00 p.m. at the Main Library. These opera plays were originally written by teenagers with disabilities. Elaine suggests that you call Sharon DeGarmo, Administrative Assistant, at the CMHC Foundation for ticket information.

New Business

Michelle requested that the August meeting be canceled as she will be on vacation. Elaine will also be away. A vote was taken. Moved to accept by David seconded by Dana. Approved unanimously.

Other Business

None

Public Comment

None

Motion to adjourn was made by David, seconded by Dana. Approved unanimously at 6:47 p.m.