




Patient-dumping on Skid Row investigated

LOS ANGELES, California (AP) -- Authorities have launched a criminal investigation into suspected dumping of homeless people on Skid Row after police witnessed ambulances leaving five people on a street there during the weekend.

The city attorney's office is reviewing police videotapes and photographs of the five suspected dumping cases to determine whether the patients were falsely imprisoned during their transfer and whether the hospital, Los Angeles Metropolitan Medical Center, violated any laws regarding the treatment of patients.

Two patients told officers Sunday they did not want to be taken downtown, said police Capt. Andrew Smith. One was not even homeless, he said. ([Watch how five people were left on Skid Row -- 2:34](#) )

"There is an expression in the medical profession that is something to the effect of 'Do no harm,'" Chief William Bratton said at a press conference.

"When a hospital or an ambulance service takes an individual into Skid Row and leaves them and drives off, they are subjecting that person to considerable risk," he added.

Medical center officials denied improperly handling the patients.

"With all of the issues, why would we send someone there who did not ask to go there? It is illogical," John V. Fenton, president and chief executive of Los Angeles Metropolitan Medical Center, told the Los Angeles Times.

Skid Row has one of the nation's largest concentrations of homeless people, in part because it has a cluster of shelters and services to help them.

Police have long suspected that several institutions, including law enforcement agencies from outside the city, were using the downtown neighborhood as a dumping ground for homeless people. This is the first criminal probe by the LAPD into the practice.

In one case, a man dropped off at Skid Row was in fact not homeless, said Smith, the LAPD captain. A police officer took him home and the man's family was "outraged," he said.

"Not only did they not know that he was discharged, but the fact that he had been brought to Skid Row instead of being brought home was what further outraged that family," Smith said at a news conference Tuesday.

The investigation began on Sunday, when an LAPD sergeant saw a patient being left in front of the Volunteers of America homeless services facility.

The sergeant called an LAPD videographer, who over the next few hours recorded four more ambulances arriving at the facility and leaving recently discharged patients.

Fenton said three of the five patients had arrived at the hospital from Volunteers of America or the nearby Lamp Community center, and gave the street addresses on their admission information.

Officials at Lamp and Volunteers of America, however, said they had no record of any of the five patients having been at their facilities. Police also said the patients stated in their interviews that they didn't want to be left there.

James Fraley, an attendant with ProCare, a private ambulance company, told police the hospital had hired his company to move discharged patients from the medical center to Skid Row, the Times reported.

No law prevents hospitals from sending patients to Skid Row after they've been discharged.

But the city attorney is investigating whether taking homeless people from a hospital to Skid Row would violate federal laws against releasing or transferring patients who are medically unstable and whether hospitals can be sued for unscrupulous behavior.

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