Glad You Asked: 10/01/2012

Subject

Prisoner's in the hospital
I want to write to Glad You Asked about...
Work Environment/Other issues

Question:

Many prisoners receive care at UNCH. When they enter the hospital they are rarely handcuffed and usually walking a few feet ahead or behind a corrections officer. How is this safe? As an employee I do not feel comfortable with the laid back attitude the corrections officers have towards the prisoners while they are here. I can't imagine how this makes patients feel; At least once a day I have seen the horrified looks on patients' faces when they are on an elevator with an unrestrained prisoner, walking down the hall with a prisoner closer to them than the guard. How can this be addressed?

Answer:

UNC Hospitals provides care to forensic patients from federal, state, and local confinement facilities on a regular basis. A significant number of these patients are inmates from the North Carolina Department of Public Safety / Prisons, which is responsible for the custody and care of approximately 38,300 inmates statewide. Inmates who receive care at UNC Hospitals and other outside medical providers are transported with the level of security and restraints that are appropriate for their custody level, which takes into account their crime(s), risk for escape, and any behavioral problems. Some inmates are unrestrained because they are in a low level of security, and are judged to pose little risk to the public. This is the same type of inmate that participates in community work assignments and other jobs out in public, and they are supervised by an accompanying officer as they receive their treatment. However, many inmates who visit the hospital are in fact transported in restraints because they require a higher level of security, and many hospital employees have probably seen these inmates wearing handcuffs and leg restraints while being escorted by one or more armed correctional officers. NCDPS / Prisons takes seriously its obligation and mission to protect the public, and provides security for inmates at outside medical facilities that is based on strict policies and procedures. Our correctional officers are expected to act professionally and appropriately at all times. NCDPS - Prisons works closely with UNC Hospitals Police to ensure that inmates receive outstanding medical treatment in a safe and secure manner, and other patients should be reassured of this if a question arises. If any UNC Hospitals employee sees a situation with an inmate and / or correctional officer that is concerning to them, they should call Hospitals Police immediately at 6-3686 for assistance. NCDPS / Prisons values the longstanding working relationship it has with the UNC Hospitals system and appreciates having the opportunity to address this question.