



(Dec. 1, 2016) My beloved son Danny has schizoaffective disorder, a chronic mental health condition where a person experiences a combination of schizophrenia and mood disorder symptoms, such as hallucinations, delusions, depression and mania. In California, he has been on a permanent court ordered LPS (Lanterman Petris-Short) conservatorship before he was sent to the psychiatric Napa State Hospital in 2012.

After an episode of isolation and restraint at Napa State Hospital, Danny was charged with a felony inside the hospital. Since then, he's been incarcerated off and on, as the state of California tries to establish his

competency to stand trial. He has bounced between two state hospitals and the jail, but not regained legal competency. This has gone on for four years.

My son, who needs treatment for a serious mental illness, has spent months in jail while awaiting competency for a trial and for a bed at a state hospital. Sadly, this is what amounts to a “system of care” for people struggling with mental illness.

Across our country, this is an all too common scenario — the human log jam of psychiatric patients, waiting for #aBedInstead.

For two days, I was holding my breath that everything would fall into place and the court order to transfer Danny to a hospital would be completed. There were so many balls being juggled by so many people in so many counties. If even one ball dropped, Danny would be stuck in a solitary cell for months.

Last Monday, I received notice that there was a psychiatric bed for Danny. However, the bed would only be held a few days and we were due in court the morning of Danny’s transfer. I asked the court if the date could be moved up, but it couldn't. But, everyone pitched in to make sure this bed didn't slip away. There were heroics at play and a lot of luck. That has been our story for 15 years. My son's life has depended on a system of luck and heroics, instead of a system of care.

While an agreement had been in negotiation for weeks with many people working to reach a settlement to get Danny in a therapeutic environment, he sat in solitary waiting for a lucky break or for the system to figure it out. He was suicidal. He was losing hope. Miraculously, the Public Defender was tenacious in her defense that Danny was not likely ever going to be restored to competency. The DA wasn't ready to concede that, because the statute allows for more “competency training.” Although, the DA had developed compassion over time and was no longer seeing things in black and white or prison orange. Bureaucracy and rules kept getting in the way of logic and compassion.

Finally, Danny was transferred out of the county jail and transported to his new home in a psychiatric treatment center in Merced County, California. A Sheriff Deputy from Napa County agreed to come in on his day off to transport Danny. Had he not agreed to do that, my son would have been left behind bars by himself, still waiting.

This nightmare started in November of 2011 when Danny was hospitalized on the day before Thanksgiving. As we approach the New Year, my son is thankful for all who refused to settle and who never gave up on him. I am too. Our family is so thankful for all who supported us and our son.

When I got the call from Danny that he was safely transferred, I could not believe the joy in his voice! My son is a sweet and joyful person and it has been too long since I heard such a tone of jubilation from him. It was the tone of freedom. Freedom does indeed ring.

What I'm learning in this journey is that at times, we must question the rules and refuse to settle for the status quo. We need to get personal, get real, speak up and share our mental illness stories. No patient who needs psychiatric care should wait for it in jail — like my son has — for years.

Pass #MentalHealthReform now!!

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