

# Feds involved in Nevada patient-dumping case

By Lee Romney, Los Angeles Times

SAN FRANCISCO – Following state Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg's call for an investigation, federal authorities have taken disciplinary action against a Nevada hospital in an alleged case of "patient dumping" in California.

In a letter dated Thursday, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services gave Nevada 10 days to correct problems at Rawson-Neal Psychiatric Hospital following reports it may have improperly discharged patients and bused them out of state.

"If we do not receive an acceptable, timely submission, or if a resurvey finds that the hospital is not complying with any [conditions of participation], we will notify you that we are initiating action to terminate the facility's Medicare provider agreement," the letter stated.

Steinberg's concern was prompted by a Sacramento Bee story about Flavy Coy Brown, who was discharged from the Las Vegas hospital with a one-way Greyhound bus ticket to Sacramento and a three-day supply of medication.

When he arrived at a Sacramento homeless shelter Feb. 13, staff described Brown as confused and scared. They said he had no money, medication or understanding of why he was sent to Sacramento.

The Bee followed with an investigative report that said Rawson-Neal had purchased one-way bus tickets for 1,500 discharged patients over five years, some of whom had been sent to locations where they had no contacts.

The revelations prompted the city attorneys of Los Angeles and San Francisco to announce probes into the matter earlier this week. Rawson-Neal patients were bused to both cities, according to the Bee's findings.

Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval said in a statement that his office had launched three separate investigations and that disciplinary actions had been taken. The governor's office determined that policies were not followed in at least one instance. The new policy, he said, provides "additional oversight" to ensure the hospital follows proper discharge procedures.

"I take the concerns regarding Rawson-Neal Psychiatric Hospital very seriously and it is not the policy of the state of Nevada to engage in 'patient dumping,'" he said in a statement.

The director of Nevada's Department of Health and Human Services also issued a statement saying the problems were not systemic.

On Friday, Steinberg, D-Sacramento, said that Rawson-Neal's administration and the state of Nevada "must be held accountable by federal regulators."

"People with mental health disorders can recover with access to prevention, early intervention and treatment," he wrote in a statement. "Instead, this man being treated for schizophrenia and depression was given a one-way ticket to a place he'd never been. Such actions are tantamount to abuse, and I'm relieved that CMS is taking action."