

**MINUTES OF A REGULAR MEETING  
BOARD OF TRUSTEES  
TRENTON PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL**

A meeting of the Board of Trustees of Trenton Psychiatric Hospital was held on **Thursday, January 19, 2023**, pursuant to notice duly given. In conformance with the Public Open Meetings Law, notice of the meeting has been sent to The Trenton Times, The Trentonian, Newark Star-Ledger and the Secretary of State and a notice placed on the bulletin board of Trenton Psychiatric Hospital.

**Present:**

\*\*\*Neil Weisfeld - Chairperson  
\*\*\*Patricia Carr – Vice Chairperson  
\*\*\*Maureen Lebel – LSW, PhD.  
\*\*\*Carolyn Torre - RN, MA APN

**Excused:**

Susan Rubino, MD

\*\*\***Board Member Via Microsoft Team and Via call in on Microsoft teams**

**TPH Staff Attendance:**

Maria Christensen, CEO; James Hollen, Deputy Chief Executive Officer-Operations (DCEO); Faith Johnson, Deputy Chief Executive Officer-Clinical (DCEO); Michelle Senni, Executive Assistant to the CEO; Julie VanHouten, Chief Nursing Officer; Frank Miller, QI Director; Towana Wilkins, Business Manager; Sheila Kwoka, Secretary to the Board

**Guest:**

Mary Jean Weston, DMHAS  
Monica Kelly, Complex Administrator of Travers

**Excused:**

Intikhab Ahmad, M.D., Clinical Director

**ROLL CALL/CALL TO ORDER/MINUTES APPROVAL:**

Roll call was conducted via Microsoft Teams and Microsoft Teams Call-in. The Board of Trustees meeting was called to order at 9:30 a.m. Minutes from the December 15, 2022, meeting were approved with changes.

## REMARKS OF OUTGOING CHAIR NEIL E. WEISFELD

*Friends:* It's fitting, I think, for me to offer some remarks at the end of my two-year tenure as Board chair. I will try to limit my comments to under two hours, unless I hear papers rustling or phones ringing or see some of you onscreen excitedly playing video games.

No chair has had more supportive colleagues. My highly dedicated and helpful vice-chair, Patricia Carr, as well as Carolyn Torre and Dr. Maureen Lebel, have been wonderful in several ways. Consistently, they have tolerated my jokes and my peccadilloes (look it up -- I did), praised staff efforts that should be praised, raised questions when raising questions was appropriate, and been steadfast, conscientious, and courteous. Pat, Carolyn, and I have worked together for many, many years now and just about can finish each other's sentences, and Maureen has impressively stepped in and performed as if she has been part of the group all along.

I have known many boards. This is the only one in my recollection in which every Board member was focused exclusively on the well-being of the organization involved and never has sought personal favors or put individual or outside interests first.

I'm also indebted to staff members who helped me along the way. They include Dr. Maria Christensen, James Hollen, Michelle Senni, and Sheila Kwoka. My deep thanks go to each of you, for I always felt you were on my side and wanted the Board and me to perform well, and you have shown me kindnesses that I appreciate. Several other key staff members also have been shining examples of civil servants, and I'm not listing them only out of fear of wrongly leaving someone out.

As a Board, we further have been enhanced by the contributions of the representative from the Department of Human Services, Mary Jean Weston, our own "Ms. 988." Simply put, Mary Jean is the perfect liaison. She has persuaded me, for one, that her department is firmly leading necessary efforts to rationalize and expand mental health care in New Jersey.

This hospital is exceptional. People facing overwhelming challenges have come here as patients, been treated with compassion and respect, and been guided effectively to a path of wellness and hope. In recent years, the hospital even has become a model of economically efficient care, successfully discharging patients with very long lengths of stay who seemingly had regarded TPH as their permanent home. The readmission rate, meanwhile, has been reduced by two-thirds to, I believe, an impressively low 14 percent, all within five years.

It's an absurd understatement to say the past two years have been difficult for our hospital. The COVID pandemic has repeatedly thwarted treatment efforts. We suddenly, through a horrific tragedy, lost the services of our then-CEO, Robyn Caporoso. The Joint Commission has unevenly and sometimes strangely criticized our performance. Violence has been hard to contain, here as elsewhere in our

society. Staffing, always a problem, has become even tougher to maintain. Through all this, the hospital has put best practices in place and coupled data-driven analysis with personalized care.

The Board, too, has encountered challenges, albeit far less formidable. One challenge has been a drastic reduction in Welfare Fund revenues associated with COVID lockdowns and restrictions. Another challenge has been the need to function at an effective level with three empty seats out of seven, and to meet only remotely.

I think we've met the challenges. We have replaced a previous Board without missing a beat. We have developed changes to our Bylaws to reflect reality and facilitate good work. We've explored the hospital's image through a high-level task force. We've enabled the acquisition of a new bus to improve transportation. We've monitored the on-site management of COVID-19 and toured the campus to ensure desired enhancements were in place. We bolstered James during his tenure as Acting CEO and welcomed Maria as our new leader. We've promoted programming, brought about improvements in monthly reports, provided support to staff members, demanded credible answers to pressing questions, commended some terrific individuals, and told anyone who would listen that this hospital is an outstanding example of a state facility.

As for the Welfare Fund, we hope that ongoing renovations to the Schulley Trading Post, staff attention to the problem, enabling credit card payment, and such innovations as the new Boutique D' will serve to increase Welfare Fund revenues further in the near future. If not, we will pursue other ideas.

My goals as chair included promoting programming, increasing Trading Post revenues, and shining a light on the need for better mental health care in the state. These goals, in my opinion, remain relevant. I leave the chair confident the efforts of my extremely competent successor will advance all these goals. And, she will have my full support.

This week we celebrated the birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr. He said, "A great nation is a compassionate nation." Surely, compassion is nowhere more essential than in the care of people, especially medically indigent people, with serious mental illness. Let's rededicate ourselves to that endeavor.

Thank you all.

## **BOARD REPORT:**

### **December Monthly Report:**

- Ms. Carr favorably noted the hard work of the New Leaf Gardeners.
- Ms. Carr favorably noted that monthly discharges had doubled over the previous month.
- Ms. Torre favorably noted a one-fourth decline in assaults over the previous month.
- Ms. Torre also favorably noted a two-fifths decline in restraints over the previous month, as well as a decline in emergency department visits.
- Ms. Torre favorably noted that the Holiday Express and Christmas Light Shows were very successful. Patients boarded the bus to tour the Stratton Circle and see the light show.
- Ms. Torre was very pleased that no patients were referred for suicide risk assessment in December, whereas 21 patients had been referred the previous month.
- Ms. Torre was very pleased the hospital is collaborating with Thomas Edison State University in applying to the State Department of Labor for a grant to support nursing preceptorships, a nurse education professional track, and an Advance Nurse Practitioner pathway for psychiatric nurse practitioners.
- Dr. Lebel expressed support for the level of participation in the Substance Use Disorder Clinic.
- Mr. Weisfeld was concerned that 84 patients were identified as COVID-positive during the course of the month. Most were placed in the King unit.

## **AUXILIARY REPORT:**

The Friendship Baptist Church Gardening Club generously provided many Christmas presents for patients. Virtually all patients received a holiday gift.

## COMMITTEE REPORTS:

- **Incident Committee - Dr. Maureen Lebel**

There was no report this month. Dr. Lebel requested specific information about A+ Incidents, which Mr. Miller offered to provide. Mr. Miller and Ms. Senni described a process to ensure that Dr. Lebel will receive full notification about Violence Prevention Committee meetings. Ms. Torre provided historical context for relating to the Incident Committee and its relationship to the hospital's Violence Prevention Committee.

- **Legislative Committee – Ms. Carolyn Torre**

**Health Professions Bill relevant for all APNs:**

**-S1522:** Removes certain restrictions on APN practice. The bill was heard in the Senate Health Committee on 12/15/22 and was reported favorably by unanimous vote of those present. The bill now moves to the full Senate for a vote. It must also be heard in the Assembly Health Committee and an identical bill to that in the Senate, must then be passed by the Assembly.

**This bill will:**

- a. Remove the Joint Protocol currently required between an APN and a collaborating physician
- b. The rule requiring that APNs-Anesthesia work under the supervision of an anesthesiologist, and
- c. Grant signature recognition to APNs

Primary Senate Sponsor: Vitale; Singleton (and 12 Co-sponsors). S1522 is identical to A2286 (Munoz; Jasey; Spearman and 20 Co-sponsors). **Senator Zwicker, is now a co-sponsor.**

**Comment:**

Assemblyman Conaway, the Chairman of the Assembly Health Committee has long been opposed to any legislation that might ease barriers to APN practice, in line with the AMA, echoed by the NJ Medical Society. Many individual physicians as well as organizations outside of medicine and nursing support this legislation, including but not limited to AARP; the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the National Governors Association because it will increase patient's access to primary and psychiatric health care providers.

**Mental Health Related Bills** Currently Before NJ Legislature and recently active: Dates of recent action in bold.

Added in January 2023:

1. A359/S2190: Establishes mental awareness pilot program in DOE. A359: Introduced 1/11/22. S2190: Introduced 3/7/22.  
Sponsors: Dunn, Murphy & Verrelli. S. Sponsors: Bucco; Durr  
Link: [https://pub.njleg.state.nj.us/Bills/2022/A0500/359\\_I1.PDF](https://pub.njleg.state.nj.us/Bills/2022/A0500/359_I1.PDF)
0. A1141/S2790: Requires health insurance coverage for annual mental health screenings. Introduced: A: 1/10/22; S: 6/6/22.  
Sponsors: A: DePhillips. S: Corrado; Schepesi  
Link: [https://pub.njleg.state.nj.us/Bills/2022/S3000/2790\\_I1.PDF](https://pub.njleg.state.nj.us/Bills/2022/S3000/2790_I1.PDF)

- **Schulley Trading Post – Mr. Neil Weisfeld**

Mr. Weisfeld told the Board we are about two to three weeks away from installing new flooring in the Schulley Trading Post. There was a large deficit in the month of December, but a financial gain is projected to appear in about two months.

- **Therapeutic Environment Committee – Ms. Patricia Carr**

**RECENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS** – The Tour of De’lights ran from December 21, 2022, to January 9, 2023. The Annual Avant Garden Day event will take place on April 28, 2023.

**WISH LIST**- Covered walkways in Lincoln to protect patients from the elements during inclement weather.

**PROJECTS WAITING IN THE WINGS** - Erecting of the outside gazebos for fresh air breaks and programming (permits pending).

- **Welfare Fund – Mr. Weisfeld**

Mr. Weisfeld noted that Welfare Fund expenditures do not appear to be keeping pace with expectations. It was noted that purchases of all decorations were not yet recorded. Staff agreed to furnish a “Wish List” next month. In addition, concerts and festivals are coming back to Trenton Psychiatric Hospital as COVID-19 restrictions are relaxed. Revenue from the new **BOUTIQU’D** will be discussed in future meetings, as well.

**ELECTION OF OFFICERS:**

Pursuant to the Board's Bylaws, the annual election of officers took place. On the motion of Ms. Carr, seconded by Dr. Lebel, **CAROLYN TORRE** was elected unanimously to a one-year term as Chair. On the motion of Ms. Torre, seconded by Dr. Lebel, **PATRICIA CARR** was elected unanimously to a one-year term as Vice-Chair. Mr. Weisfeld congratulated the new officers on their election.

Report from Ms. Mary Jean Weston, MSW, Regional Coordinator Office of Community Services, Division of Mental Health & Addiction Services (DMHAS)  
(January 19, 2023)

1. **[Fast Facts on Fentanyl, Cocaine, and More](#)**

The DEA is debuting Drugs of Abuse (2022), a resource outlining the appearance, effects, street names, and more of fentanyl, cocaine, and more. Download the [comprehensive guide](#) -- also available [in Spanish](#) -- or visit [Get Smart About Drugs' Fact Sheet Hub](#) to access individual fact sheets.

2. **Webinar: From Pills to Fentanyl: Understanding the Opioid Crisis**

Partnership for a Drug Free New Jersey and the Department of Human Services  
Thursday, January 26, 2023  
11:00 am – 12:00 pm

**Register in advance:**

[https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_1zmRaMBqRxW\\_DxkWjZ\\_KQA](https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_1zmRaMBqRxW_DxkWjZ_KQA)

*After registering, you will receive a confirmation email with your webinar link*

1. **Webinar: What stops people from asking for help?**

Mental Health Association of Monmouth, DMHAS and NJAMHAA are presenting a free, virtual webinar titled: The “Big Four” Circumstances That Impact Families & Decision Making: Guilt ~ Stigma ~ Grief & Loss ~ Stress

Wednesday, February 1, 2023

9:30 am – 11:00 am

**Register in advance:**

[https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_6vVhcz5LQc-U72xl0I6ggg](https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_6vVhcz5LQc-U72xl0I6ggg)

*After registering, you will receive a confirmation email with your webinar link*

2. **988 Updates**

a. **RFP for 988 Managing Entity**

An RFP was published on January 3, 2023, to establish a Managing Entity (ME) for the New Jersey 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline system. The ME will collaborate with current and future New Jersey 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline crisis centers; monitor referrals made by 988 Lifeline centers to ensure connections are made for referrals to treatment; handle data collection and reporting to DMHAS and SAMHSA; create and maintain, or subcontract for, a Resource and Referral Database; provide training to 988 Lifeline centers; and dispatch Mobile Crisis Response teams. Annualized funding: \$2,000,000 (subject to State appropriations).

b. **Additional SAMHSA Funding**

DMHAS has received an additional \$1 million (Supplemental Grant) from SAMHSA to further build capacity for the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline system. This funding will allow 988 Lifeline centers to expand staffing. DMHAS will also be able to develop new public messaging strategies.

c. **Listening Sessions for Mobile Crisis Response**

Three Listening Sessions regarding the Mobile Crisis Response (MCR) program will be held for members of the public to share their thoughts, ideas and concerns with DMHAS leadership. There will be one virtual and two in-person meetings during January. The MCR program has been allocated \$16 million in the State FY23 budget.

**COMMUNICATIONS:** – There were no communications this month.

**OLD BUSINESS:** –

The Nursing Department is struggling to hire nurses. The Nursing Department is bringing in Agency Nurses to help. The Nursing Department is also doing a Job Fair to recruit new nurses.

**NEW BUSINESS:**

- Ms. Torre provided information about the “Essential Pocket Guide to Opioid Uses” developed by advanced practice nurses. **(Available at AANO.org).**

**COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC** – There were no comments from the public.

**Post-meeting Presentation:**

Ms. Monica Kelly, Travers Complex Administrator, provided an Update on the complex. She noted, in part, the following initiatives:

- **Holiday Express:**  
Patients went in-person to see Holiday Express in the Lincoln Gym. The Travers complex was split into two clusters. Cluster #1 went earlier in the afternoon, and Cluster #2 went later in the afternoon.
- **Holiday Decorating:**  
The patients and staff decorated the Travers Complex and the Cottages for Christmas. There were snacks and music, and the patients and staff had a great time.

**ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 10:50 a.m. The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, February 16, 2023, at 9:30 a.m., via Microsoft Teams.

Respectfully submitted,

---

Sheila Kwoka  
Secretary Board of Trustees

---

Neil Weisfeld  
Chairperson

NW/sk