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Advocacy Inc. Receives Grant from Hogg Foundation to Improve Emergency Psychiatric Services in Austin

AUSTIN – [Advocacy, Inc.](#), an Austin-based statewide nonprofit agency that protects the legal rights of people with disabilities, was awarded a \$67,963 grant from the [Hogg Foundation for Mental Health](#) for a project to improve emergency psychiatric care in Austin area hospitals.

Advocacy, Inc. is one of six Texas-based organizations that received a total of \$456,565 in grants from the Hogg Foundation in November. The foundation awarded the grants to support timely, meaningful projects that address key issues related to mental health and are likely to improve mental health policies affecting Texas residents.

“The foundation is continuing our longstanding practice of funding projects to address important and relevant mental health issues that directly affect the people of Texas,” said Dr. Octavio N. Martinez Jr., executive director of the foundation. “The grants also will help build interest in and capacity for mental health policy research and development work among nonprofit agencies, academic institutions and government agencies in Texas.”

People experiencing a mental health crisis in Austin and elsewhere in Texas have limited options for emergency care, according to Advocacy, Inc. Increasingly they go to hospital emergency rooms that lack the staff, training, resources and facilities to assess and treat their problems effectively.

The advocacy group has received numerous complaints from consumers of mental health services about problems encountered in hospital emergency rooms, such as long waits in crowded, loud and confusing conditions; negative attitudes and stereotyping among staff; little or no information provided about the consumer’s mental illness and treatment; and unnecessary or inappropriate physical restraints.

Furthermore, many emergency care professionals aren't adequately trained to assess and treat mental illness or interact with people in psychiatric crisis and don't know about the laws that protect people seeking treatment, according to Mary Faithfull, executive director of Advocacy, Inc.

"This unfortunate collision of circumstances can have dangerous consequences for people in crisis at a time when they are most vulnerable and have nowhere else to go. The foundation's grant will enable us to work with hospitals and consumers in Austin to improve emergency room services for people experiencing a psychiatric crisis," Faithfull said.

Advocacy, Inc. plans to join with consumers and hospital staff in the Austin area to identify and prioritize concerns. The group then will work with Susan Stefan, a nationally known expert in psychiatric crisis care from the Massachusetts-based [Center for Public Representation](#), to adopt policies and standards for care and train hospital staff.

The project developed in Austin can serve as a model for improving psychiatric crisis care in other Texas communities, Faithfull said.

"Our emergency rooms and the professionals who staff them have become part of the mental health care system in Texas. All Texans should expect and deserve ethical, equitable and appropriate mental health care," Martinez said. "This grant will help identify how to improve the delivery of psychiatric services in an emergency room setting."

The Hogg Foundation was founded in 1940 by Miss Ima Hogg, daughter of former Texas Governor James Stephen Hogg, to promote improved mental health for the people of Texas. The foundation's grants and programs support mental health consumer services, research, policy analysis and public education projects in Texas. The foundation is part of the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement at The University of Texas at Austin.

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