

## Security slips at hospital still a problem

Several psychiatric patients escaped in past two years

By ALAN GUSTAFSON

Statesman Journal

Locked up in Oregon State Hospital's crowded forensic psychiatric program for the criminally insane, Gino Puglisi used pay phones to run up sports-gambling debts and to enlist conspirators to help him escape.

Contraband came to him through the mail. In one envelope addressed to Spiderman, Puglisi's nickname, he received a cell phone, \$1,000 cash and hacksaw blades, according to a state police investigative report obtained by the Statesman Journal.

Puglisi, 39, pulled off an elaborate escape plan last February, when he cut through a security fence with bolt cutters provided by a former hospital employee. After nine days on the run, he was arrested by police in Beaverton and charged with escape, attempting to elude police and possession of morphine.

Sent back to the psychiatric facility, Puglisi picked up where he left off -- determined to bust out. In October, police arrested two people who drove to the hospital campus along Center Street NE in a stolen car. They allegedly had cutting tools and methamphetamine.

The October incident remains under investigation. However, hospital employees and patients say the two suspects intended to help Puglisi escape.

Hospital officials recently breathed easier after Puglisi was transferred to the state prison system following his conviction on escape and drug-possession charges stemming from the February breakout.

"He was a handful," said Maynard Hammer, the hospital's interim superintendent. "That last one took some doing. I mean you bring in two persons with police records and a stolen car from Washington to try to cut a secure perimeter (fence)."

Puglisi's case sheds light on the kinds of security risks -- and lapses -- that crop up in the state hospital's largest and most volatile program.

In the last two years, a dozen forensic patients have escaped. Other patients have smuggled in methamphetamine, marijuana, weapons and other contraband. Still others have become entangled in romantic relationships with hospital staff members.

Most forensic patients were committed to the psychiatric facility instead of jail or prison because judges found them guilty of crimes but insane at the time. Their crimes ranged from shoplifting to murder.

Forensic wards chronically are overcrowded and currently hold about 460 patients --

exceeding the budgeted capacity by about 30.

Program managers and staff juggle dueling responsibilities -- dispensing therapy, which often includes doses of freedom for patients granted passes for community outings, and running a safe and secure institution. It's a tough balancing act in a cramped, woefully outdated facility that is part hospital, part prison.

Citing patients' civil rights, Hammer said there's nothing to prevent troublesome patients from using phones to gamble or set up deals to get contraband.

Most forensic patients -- even on maximum-security wards -- have access to hallway phones.

"They have phone privileges unless there's something particular that causes them to lose them temporarily," Hammer said. "We have some patients that tend to like to dial 911 continually, and we'll often block that. But generally speaking, they have phone privileges."

Few patients match Puglisi's talent or zeal for poking holes in security, Hammer said. But he acknowledged that some patients have similar tendencies.

"They're intelligent folks. They know the street. They know how to manipulate and organize things," he said. "They've got a lot of time, and they've got access to (phone and mail) communications. Sometimes, they keep us on our toes."

Escape details revealed

On the night of Feb. 14, Puglisi bided his time in a hospital gymnasium.

Complaining that the gym was stuffy, he convinced a staff member to open a door leading to a fenced recreation area.

Puglisi took a folding chair into the enclosure, walking past a sign reading "Please Do Not Take Chairs Outside."

About 8:30 p.m., he cut through the security fence and raced to a nearby getaway van.

Details about Puglisi's escape, and the gambling bets he placed using hospital phones, emerged in state police reports recently obtained by the newspaper through a public records request.

Among the revelations:

- A former patient identified as Mary Flynn became acquainted with Puglisi during her stay at the psychiatric facility and played a key role in paying off his gambling debts and supplying him with contraband. Flynn told investigators that she received money from Puglisi and other patients in order to do so.

"Ms. Flynn said she would get instructions from Mr. Puglisi about what to do, what to

buy and how to send it or who to send things to," a state police detective wrote in summarizing an interview with the former patient. "Ms. Flynn said each time she got instructions she was to destroy them after following them and she said she had."

Flynn said she paid off the gambling debts via Western Union money orders to the Philippines and Costa Rica.

"Ms. Flynn said specifically she received several thousand dollars from a patient at the Oregon State Hospital named Tommy Gagliano (See attached Washington Mutual wire transfer notice for \$3,319 dated 1-18-2007)," states the police report. "Part of this money was to pay for gambling debts for Mr. Puglisi and the other part was to pay for a cell phone, hack saw blades and \$1,000 cash and a gift for a staff member named Diane Raines."

- Flynn reportedly told investigators that she didn't want to mail contraband to the hospital but complied with Puglisi's commands because he threatened to send people to harm her if she failed to deliver.

- Flynn said she routed the candy package to hospital staff member Raines, who then passed on the envelope addressed to Puglisi. "Also contained in the package was a Wal-Mart gift package of female bath items for Ms. Raines as a gift from Mr. Puglisi for Ms. Raines for her help," states the police report.

Interviewed by detectives after Puglisi escaped, Raines explained that she had opened the package "a little bit," just enough to see a box of peanut brittle and Almond Rocha. Describing herself as an "old softy," Raines forwarded the package to Puglisi.

The police report states: "Ms. Raines said she did not know there was anything else in the package except for candy. When asked if there was anything else in the box from Ms. Flynn, Ms. Raines said no. (Ms. Raines did not disclose the gift pack she received in the box from Mr. Puglisi as a thank you for her help and for her being so nice)."

- Puglisi's fence-cutting bolt cutters reportedly were supplied by a former hospital employee named Kassandra Alvarez, who was employed at the psychiatric facility for about five months in 2004. Interviewed by state police, Alvarez reportedly said she purchased the tools at a Keizer hardware store and delivered them to the hospital recreation yard.

- From his hospital ward, Puglisi made arrangements to obtain a getaway van. He reportedly selected the vehicle from a classified ad in a Eugene newspaper, then made phone calls to Alvarez and persuaded her to drive it to the hospital for use in the escape.

- On the day of the escape, Alvarez reportedly parked the van along D Street near the hospital grounds and waited for Puglisi.

- After Puglisi ran to the van, the two drove to Alvarez' apartment, where they reportedly smoked marijuana. Puglisi told a detective that he paid Alvarez \$200 for helping him escape; she denied receiving such payment.

- Another forensic patient, David Anderson, reportedly had planned to escape with Puglisi. However, Anderson got cold feet and backed out.
- At the time, Anderson reportedly was involved in a romantic relationship with Bonita Tucker, then a hospital staff member. Tucker and Anderson had planned to go to Texas after Anderson escaped with Puglisi.
- On the night of Puglisi's escape, Tucker showed up at Alvarez' apartment. She reportedly was surprised to discover that Anderson wasn't there. "Where is David?" Tucker asked.
- In the wake of Puglisi's escape, Tucker reportedly resigned from her hospital job on March 23 but subsequently stayed in contact with Anderson through phone calls to the hospital.

As of 5 p.m. Friday, the Marion County district attorneys office had not answered a Statesman Journal inquiry asking whether criminal charges had been filed against anyone reportedly involved in the contraband and escape scheme besides Puglisi.

Puglisi recently was transferred to the Oregon prison system, after his conviction on charges of escape, eluding police and drug possession. He is locked up at Snake River Correctional Institution in Ontario.

Hammer said it was hard to predict how Puglisi might adjust to prison routines.

"He may find it easier to cope there, he may do fine if he doesn't make too many enemies," he said.

Puglisi apparently got off to a rocky start at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility -- the entry point for new state prison inmates. He was charged with violating rules by giving his medication to a fellow inmate.

At Snake River -- the state's largest prison -- Puglisi now is housed in the Disciplinary Segregation Unit, where inmates are kept in their cells for at least 23 hours per day. Inmates call DSU "the hole" or "the bucket."

His medication violation resulted in Puglisi's stint in the segregation unit, and he is set to stay in the lock-down unit until the end of December, said Amber Campbell, public information officer at Snake River.

Prison officials denied the newspaper's request to conduct a telephone interview with Puglisi.

Supervision easily evaded

In contrast to Puglisi's elaborate escape efforts, Christopher Walker made his getaway by closing a door on his staff escort.

Walker, 46, slipped away from his guard on Nov. 21. He received a day pass to make a supervised visit to his mother's care facility in Portland.

It became a headline-grabbing debacle because Walker had a history of murder, arson and assault. He fatally stabbed his girlfriend almost 20 years ago during a drug-induced psychotic episode.

Conditionally released from the hospital in 1996, Walker reportedly caused no problems for years. But he demolished his good-behavior record in 2003, when he tried to blow up a propane tank at a Portland business.

In that episode, Walker lit the end of a propane hose and used it like a flamethrower to keep officers at bay. Firefighters doused the flames, and Walker was arrested.

Sent back to the state hospital, Walker reportedly made enough progress in treatment that his doctors gave him the privilege of supervised visits out of the hospital.

At the Portland care facility, Walker reportedly used a building access code to enter the facility. He then closed the door to prevent his staff escort from getting inside. According to police reports, the guard called the state hospital to report what had happened, but nobody called police for at least 45 minutes.

The delay gave Walker time to flee. Police spotted him the next morning in a Portland neighborhood. Walker tried to run away but officers caught him.

Hammer said the incident prompted a sweeping review of forensic program pass privileges and staff supervision for patients on such outings.

"We're reviewing our own procedures to make sure we're following what we should be following," he said. "That's part of our commitment to the community when we say we have a secure facility."

#### Pass restrictions

As forensic patients undergo treatment for mental illness, community outings play a key part in preparing them for life after the institution, hospital officials said. In a typical month, they said, hundreds of patients benefit from leaving the hospital for approved outings.

Passes allow them to visit relatives, shop, exercise, attend Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, visit libraries, conduct job searches, enjoy rafting trips and more.

Community outings provide welcome relief from hospital strife and stress for patients cooped up on crowded hospital wards. In most cases, they cause no problems when they leave the hospital.

Good intentions can go awry, however. Some patients bolt from supervised passes, like Walker, and others fail to return from unsupervised outings.

Richard Laing, an outspoken critic of hospital conditions and care, said he escaped because he was frustrated by futile efforts to win his discharge from the state Psychiatric Security Review Board.

On Nov. 18, 2005, Laing failed to return to the hospital from his unsupervised pass, ostensibly to visit Salem Public Library.

After nearly two years on the lam, police recently collared Laing in Portland. His arrest came after he was spotted by Mary Claire Buckley, the director of the Psychiatric Security Review Board. Buckley notified police and officers nabbed Laing.

Unlike Laing, most escapees are caught within hours, or days, of getting away, records show. Of the 12 forensic program escapes recorded during the past two years, half were caught on the same day they took off.

As part of the security review launched in the wake of Walker's escape, hospital officials temporarily suspended pass privileges for many patients.

Hammer said passes were rescinded for patients not currently on a planning track to be conditionally released from the hospital. Passes continued for patients with release planning, he said.

"There was no blanket revocation of passes," Hammer said.

Still, the clamp down on pass privileges prompted grumbling from some patients.

"It's like a concentration camp," Reynaldo Rios said, calling the newspaper from his forensic ward.

Longtime patient Robert Martyr described the clamp down as "the typical knee-jerk reaction" to a high-profile escape.

Hammer said hospital officials took Walker's escape seriously because it raised questions about staff diligence and the use of one-on-one supervision for patients.

"I had a question myself when it was reported to me: Why did we send him up there with one escort? That doesn't necessarily speak to how dangerous the patient is; it speaks to the fact that anything can happen with one escort. What if the person gets sick or you have a car accident? So there's a number of reasons we needed to kind of look at the whole process."

Hammer said he anticipated that pass privileges gradually would be reinstated for those patients who lost them.

"What we're trying to do is make sure that the passes are consistent with treatment plans, and, if there are passes and privileges, that it's with the appropriate level of security and the appropriate number of escorts," he said.

## Dangerous escapees

Here's a look at some of the dangerous patients who have escaped from Oregon State Hospital's forensic psychiatric program for the criminally insane:

2006: Mother killer Thaddeus Ziemplak escaped by running away from a staff member while visiting the Big 5 Sporting Goods store on Lancaster Drive NE. Two days later, he was captured 350 miles away in Wenatchee, Wash.

2003: Robber and hostage taker Michael Marks escaped by scaling a 12-foot fence topped with four feet of coiled razor wire. He was captured a week later in Vancouver, Wash. Police said Marks had two stolen guns, a television set and other stolen items stuffed in pillowcases.

1995: Killer David Ball, committed to the hospital for stabbing to death his stepdaughter's boyfriend, walked away from a work detail. He turned himself into authorities three days later, calling police from a West Salem phone booth.

1991: Double killer Michael McCormack slipped away from a hospital staff member during an outing to the Oregon Supreme Court law library. McCormack traveled across the country, disguising himself as a woman. Three weeks later, the FBI collared him at a Western Union office in Canton, Ohio.

1981: Rapist Michael Perrine sawed his way out of the hospital, and later was accused of stabbing to death a Texas cook. After a Texas court ruled that Perrine was mentally incompetent to stand trial, he was extradited to Oregon and placed back in the state hospital in 1983. Within days, he hanged himself by tying a sock around his neck and attaching it to a window screen in his room.