**Rape and Abuse at Oregon State Hospital**

Posted on [October 15, 2004](http://amptoons.com/blog/2004/10/15/rape-and-abuse-at-oregon-state-hospital/) by [Ampersand](http://amptoons.com/blog/author/admin/)

[Sheelzebub at Pinko Feminist Hellcat](http://pinkofeministhellcat.typepad.com/pinko_feminist_hellcat/2004/10/i_thought_we_we.html) comments on this [*Oregonian* article](http://www.oregonlive.com/news/oregonian/index.ssf?/base/front_page/1095508790276280.xml), documenting a pattern of abuse and rape by Oregon State Hospital workers at Ward 40, a treatment center for children and teenagers. Even worse, the hospital had a pattern of hushing up these crimes.

The article itself is a litany of horrors, such as a fired hospital staffer using his knowledge of the hospital’s scheduling to kidnap and rape a teenager. (This same staffer apparently raped or molested five other patients; two later committed suicide). The most distressing thing for me, however, is the hospital staff’s apparent refusal to treat sexual abuse of patients as a serious problem. For example, regarding hospital employee and rapist/molester/abuser Ronnie LaCross:

On Valentine’s Day 1991, a day before [supervisor] Brakebill observed “No problems!” with LaCross’ behavior, the psychiatric aide, in violation of hospital policy, gave Darcey [a patient] a red and white teddy bear with a plastic tag that said, “I love you.”

Records show that staff confiscated the tag when Darcey used it to carve bloody wounds on her arms.

About a month later, two teenage patients demanded that staff stop LaCross from abusing Darcey. But hospital officials failed to take action.

The hospital waited almost three days before calling her caseworker at the state’s children’s services agency. The hospital did not inform police as required by law. After pestering the hospital for two days to report the suspected abuse, the caseworker called state police herself, records show.

Five months later, Mazur-Hart, the hospital superintendent, ruled that Darcey’s allegations were true. LaCross, who spent several months on paid leave, was eventually fired and convicted of second-degree sexual assault.

The girl who made the first complaint about LaCross more than a year earlier was named as an “additional victim” in police reports in the Darcey case. She told police that besides fondling her breast, LaCross had sex with her three times on the ward. LaCross was never charged in that case.

[KATU’s story](http://www.katu.com/printstory.asp?ID=71213) (based on the *Oregonian’s* reporting) includes this tidbit:

Records also suggest that one of the hospital’s whistle-blowers was demoted from his job as a mental therapist and made to scrub pots and pans in the hospital kitchen after he came forward in an affidavit saying he had warned the hospital about the ongoing abuse, The Oregonian reported.

The only reason most of this is known is that sealed court records from 1994 were misfiled in a public-records area. There’s good reason to worry that Ward 40 has continued to be a home for rapists, pedophiles and abusers since 1994. The Oregonian discovered seven cases of alleged child sex abuse in the last four years that were never reported to the chief DHS investigator.

Needed security measures that have become standard at other hospitals have not been taken:

A former worker who has since been convicted of attacking young boys, however, said the hospital was a pedophile’s dream.

In a letter to The Oregonian, Frank Milligan detailed a litany of oversight problems at the hospital, including “far too many blind corners” and a “lack of cameras or even simple surveillance equipment.”

“Should a staff member be so inclined, he/she need only wait for an emergency situation, or a patient to act out and draw the attention of the other staff, to take advantage of the chaos and slip away with a victim.”

Hopefully, the *Oregonian* article will be a start towards getting Ward 40’s appalling conditions fixed (or better yet, towards getting Ward 40 closed down and replaced with modern small-group homes). If you’d like to write Governor Ted Kulongoski a note asking him to take action, [here’s his contact information](http://www.governor.state.or.us/Gov/contact_us.shtml).