

Employee



Spotlight

The RISP H Rehab Team



Patients at the Rhode Island State Psychiatric Hospital arrive with a wide range of medical and mental health needs, and for many, there is also an underlying question: Why am I here?

This is where the hospital's work begins. Its medical team diagnoses patients and prescribes treatments. Its nursing team administers medication and monitors patients' symptoms. And its rehab team, building on this foundation, puts the focus on helping patients heal.

For patients with severe or persistent mental illness, healing often goes beyond addressing or managing symptoms. It means recovering essential life skills, rebuilding daily routines, and gaining insight into why they were hospitalized.

The rehab team plays a key role in this process.

“Our approach is different, and our lens is different,” said Rene Rico, the hospital's Administrator of Rehabilitative Services. “Our relationships are built through therapeutic interventions – whether it's through occupational therapy, counseling, or activities – and that's what's so beautiful about rehab services, the intervention part.”

Most patients at the hospital have been referred by the courts, after being found incompetent to stand trial. To help them, the 18-member rehab team considers their mental, physical and spiritual needs.

- **Psychologists** focus on restoring legal competency, offering counseling and therapy to help patients gain insight into their conditions.
- **Occupational therapists** help patients regain or learn essential skills for personal hygiene, emotional awareness, and daily living.
- **Recreational therapists** engage patients in activities such as art, yoga, and pastoral care, as well as programs offered by organizations such as the Rhode Island Chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI).

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Spotlight (cont'd)

- **Physical therapists** help patients recover from injuries or manage physical impairments, promoting physical well-being alongside mental health recovery.
- **Social workers** act as liaisons between patients, their families, hospital staff, and community resources, with the goal of establishing a safe discharge plan.

“Their work is critical, because they focus on key areas of need and help patients rediscover their skills and interests,” said Irina Beyder, the hospital’s CEO. “They, like all our teams, care about the patients, and it shows in the patients’ improved conditions, and how patients respond to the team’s members.”

Dr. Pedro Tactacan, the hospital’s Chief Medical Officer, called rehabilitation “one of the essential components in psychiatric care,” because it helps patients develop a “positive mental attitude” and make “better lifestyle choices.” In this way, he said, it “promotes independence and autonomy along with improving social functioning needed to thrive in the community.”

For Rico, the reward comes when patients begin to care about themselves again — a sign that they are healing.

“You can see it when they are clearer and more organized, and they’re taking care of themselves,” she said. “They start engaging in treatment and activity participating in their recovery.”

Another sign of progress is when patients want to meet with members of the team. Or when a patient or a patient’s family members, after discharge, find a way to say thank you.

“I have cards from some of them,” Rico said. “We hear a lot about the negative aspects and the negative parts of people who have been here, but there are many more success stories than there are those types of stories, and we do get a lot of gratitude, where people come back — patients, and families — and say thank you for what we’ve done.”