

Hurting people sparked quest for medical respite in Springfield

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Carol Daniel

The story of the current effort to establish a transitional medical facility for homeless people began with two hurting and homeless women Carol Daniel said she met Labor Day weekend 2011.

Daniel, a visiting clinical instructor at Missouri State University and a registered nurse, had brought her nursing students to the Missouri Hotel the previous five years. During that span, the number of people they served climbed and the problems grew more acute.

As her wide-eyed students helped the new patients the Tuesday after the holiday, Daniel said two women caught her attention.

Bruises covered the first woman's face and she wore a hospital gown and pajama bottoms.

"I thought she'd been beaten up," Daniel said.

The woman said the hospital discharged her earlier that weekend after oral surgery on multiple abscesses. She had no identification, no purse, no money and no pain medication.

She hadn't eaten since arriving because her teeth had been pulled. "For three days, she'd received no care," Daniel said.

The second woman had spent two weeks in the hospital after attempting suicide. She'd spent days on stabilizing drugs only to be released without them.

"That one broke my heart as well," Daniel said. "Those stories have been repeated in many and multiple ways since."

Daniel had been working with Michelle McCoy, executive director for One Door, a social service agency that gives motel vouchers to homeless people released from hospitals.

Daniel said McCoy worked with the nursing students Daniel sent to the Missouri Hotel and was the first person she'd heard use the phrase "medical respite." They had separately — at the same time — come up with the idea of starting such a facility.

By January 2012, one of Daniel's students, Brittany Hottenrott, had begun a paper on a transitional medical facility for homeless people too sick or injured to recuperate on the street, but not sick or injured enough to remain hospitalized. Hottenrott finished the paper in April.

By July, the story of Roger Sellman, recounted in the News-Leader, introduced the general public to the idea of a medical respite, she said.

Sellman, a homeless Springfield man, survived a July accident in which he fell into a guardrail that punctured his brain. Surgeons replaced part of his skull with a titanium plate. The hospital released him three days later.

Sellman, in pain and with a swirl of bulging stitches and staples atop his head, landed in a motel room paid for through donations. His predicament illuminated the need, Daniel said.

"There's a gap in care we have not filled," she said. "That gap is what touches us and needs to be addressed."