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New Program Offers Help to Homeless

SAN FRANCISCO (KCBS) -- Just as San Francisco is struggling with budget cuts, a new program opened this past week that offers chronically drunk and ill homeless patients a place to sober up without taking up space at hospital emergency rooms.

Margaret Blackwood tidies up her room at the newly opened Medical Respite and Sobering Center. Seven months ago when she was in jail, the nurse found a lump in her breast.

"I never had this before, you know what I'm saying" Blackwood said. "Grandmother never told anybody when she died she ended up having cancer. So it was hereditary. I thought I was being punished."

 [KCBS' Holly Quan Reports](#)

With no place to recuperate, Blackwood wound up here where she gets daily radiation and still suffers from some side effects. Next door is her friend Valerie Hughes who has sickle cell anemia.

"I was on the street homeless and I got sick," Hughes said. "I went to the hospital and I kept going back and back and back. And I guess my social worker and the doctors at the hospitals, they called over here and made some arrangements and I was told to come here."

The medical staff teach patients how to refill their prescriptions, manage the health care system and help get them into housing and off the streets.

This is also a place to bring people who are found drunk on the street. City Deputy Director of Health Barbara Garcia says instead of bringing them to the emergency room which costs money and bed space, clients can sober up here and then get intervention.

"You just can't tell somebody 'Stop drinking,' who's sleeping in the streets," she said. "It's really important to get them to that next level of care."

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