

The police should do the right thing

- Alexandra Smith and Mary Clare Dougherty / members of Rights for Imprisoned People with Psychiatric D |
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Iman Morales, a mentally ill 35, was standing on a ledge in Brooklyn when he fell to his death after being tasered by a police officer in 2008. Later, the police lieutenant who gave the order, took his life.

It is thus clear that the police have the right tools to treat patients with mental health and criminal justice system has large errors.

Police in 80 cities and counties across the country have adopted new models of intervention with psychiatric patients that are safer and avoid unnecessary arrests. However, the NYPD has refused to adopt the new models despite their proven ineffectiveness in such situations.

Instead of taking the initiative, the NYPD continues to fill the jails with mentally ill patients who need psychiatric treatment instead. Although the population of NY state prisons decreased by 8% in 2008, the prison population mental health increased by 19%.

The Crisis Intervention Team Westchester Mental Health, the police along with social workers to support them in prison with mental illness, and help them recover and keep them in their community more safely. Last week, experts from this program were to the City of New York to share the success of their model with the police at an event organized by an association to protect the rights of prisoners suffering from mental conditions (Rights for Imprisoned People with Psychiatric Disabilities or RIPP, by its initials in English).

Unfortunately, no member of the New York police came and talked to the police in Westchester, although the staff of the 79th District in Bedford Stuyvesant - where Iman Morales was killed - said he would attend. RIPP has been approached several New York stations without success. The police makes an excuse that New York is too large to implement the most effective model of intervention. But large cities like Los Angeles, Chicago and Houston have successfully implemented training programs for police officers to train them more effectively manage mental health patients and connect them with social services instead of sending them to jail.

How can the NYPD does not implement this program? The risk is too great, since the police intervened with mint health patients daily and both are in danger.

Olga Negron, mother of Iman Morales, intimately knows the risks. "I miss him a lot. My heart aches every day," she says of her son. She is not alone, the list of mentally ill New Yorkers affected by the police is too long.

The NYPD should do the right thing for New Yorkers with mental illness, his family and friends and by their own officers. Until the NYPD modernize their tactics, each call will still be an opportunity for avoidable tragedy.

*By **Alexandra Smith**, a member of RIPP and a criminal justice advocate at the Mental Health Project at the Urban Justice Center. **Mary Clare Dougherty**, Co Coordinator of Rights for Imprisoned People with Psychiatric Disabilities, contributed material for this piece. RIPP is a grassroots organization of formerly incarcerated people with psychiatric disabilities, advocates and family members.*