

New Facility For Injured, Ill Homeless To Recover

April 23, 2010

SAN DIEGO -- The San Diego County Rescue Mission has created the county's first Recuperative Care Unit, or RCU, at its Bankers Hill location. The 30-bed unit is a place for homeless people to go to recover from injuries or long-term illnesses.

"You've got to get them off of that treadmill and get them into some other supportive environment," said Herb Johnson, President of the San Diego Rescue Mission.

The RCU began nine months ago as a cooperative between four hospitals and the Rescue Mission. It was inspired by a study that revealed the county spent about \$1.5 million to care for 15 homeless people through the emergency room.

Those medical bills are typically paid off through taxpayers' money, but they get expensive because the patients with serious illnesses or injuries never have a place to recover.

Instead, they are housed in the hospital or keep returning to the emergency room.

Since the RCU opened, homeless patients have been taken out of hospital emergency rooms and housed at the RCU.

"They're provided with clothing, food, housing, most of all a safe environment where they can rest, recover," said RCU Director Tavis Walker.

Scripps Mercy said the program has already saved \$660,000 in only six months.

Additionally, the RCU is a natural fit for the homeless clients. While the ER can take care of the immediate medical care, the Rescue Mission specializes in caring for the homeless.

"We have a special affinity and a caring for this population that the hospitals are just not trained to do," Johnson said.

Clients, as they are called, get a room and receive counseling and case management. The Rescue Mission hopes once they've recovered, the clients never return to the streets.