



## State of New Jersey

### STATE PAROLE BOARD

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# Media Release

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## **Parole Officers Teach Hospital Staff to Read Patients' Gang Tattoos** *Parole Officers Give Secrets to Recognizing Gang Membership, Preventing Violence*

PRINCETON – Health care workers including emergency physicians, nurses and other medical professionals today learned about violence prevention both inside and outside hospital walls during the New Jersey Hospital Association's (NJHA) extensive, full-day "Gang Awareness Training for Hospital Personnel."

The event included presentations by parole officers in the New Jersey State Parole Board's Street Gang Unit, and representatives of AtlantiCare's Center for Community Health. The training was held from 8:30 a.m. through 4 p.m. today at NJHA's headquarters in Princeton.

"The NJHA and its members are stepping up to proactively address the street gang presence in New Jersey, and they should be commended," said Lieutenant Hector Reyes, head of the State Parole Board's Street Gang Unit. "This gang awareness training will help medical professionals prevent violence and respond to today's realities, while continuing to provide for all patients."

"We know that no community is immune to gang violence. Our patients and staff are placed in vulnerable situations when faced with the potential for violence in our emergency departments, and it is our responsibility to provide them with the tools to help them provide safe patient care," said Mary Ditri, NJHA's director of professional practice.

Gwen Muesburger, executive director of AtlantiCare's Center for Community Health, detailed how AtlantiCare's community partnerships have positively impacted the health and wellbeing of its community by reducing violence and gang activity, and revitalizing neighborhoods. "Collaboration of business, law enforcement, lawmakers, schools, community leaders and local, state and regional agencies and organizations is imperative," said Muesberger. "By partnering with community and regional hospitals they contribute to a safer, healthier, more productive society, and to stronger families."

Today's training session is expected to serve as part of a larger violence prevention education effort for hospital personnel statewide, a joint effort between NJHA and the State Parole Board. The participants learned how to recognize potential cues for violent behavior, and gained insights on when to notify security or law enforcement about possible dangers.

The parole officers' presentation, provided by Reyes as well as Sergeant Daniel Riccardo and Senior Parole Officers Raymond Vonderheide, Joseph Meroni and Thomas High, all of the State Parole Board, centered on identifiers that medical staff are most likely to see while treating an injured patient: Tattoos.

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“Tattoos can be completely innocent, and it would not be fair to be suspicious of a law-abiding citizen just because of their appearance,” Riccardo said. “That being said, if someone has a pit bull tattoo with the number ‘232’ he is identifying himself as a member of the Brick City Brim set of the Bloods, and is placing himself in real danger from other gang members if that is not the case.”

The parole officers said the key to recognizing gang-related tattoos is not in looking for particular images, but in looking for numbers. The Sex Money Murder set of the Bloods uses the number 252, for example. Certain gangs use the number 18, and a member may have a “1” on one arm and an “8” on the other.

“Two people may be rivals even if they belong to the same gang. Right now, groups of Bloods are considered the major source of violence against other groups of Bloods,” Reyes said.

To avoid violence either in the hospital or after patients leave, the parole officers advised medical staff to keep any patients who may be gang members separate to the greatest extent possible. They suggested hospitals talk with their ambulance providers, to notify the hospital before the arrival of patients who may have been injured in a gang-related incident.

The State Parole Board’s Street Gang Unit supervises about 500 parolees statewide who are self-admitted gang members, or are legally classified as gang members. The officers’ interaction with these parolees gives them a unique, street-level view of the ways gang membership affects individuals and communities, and the ways gangs attempt to lure young people.

The Street Gang Unit conducts gang education and recognition training for hospitals, universities, public schools and municipal police departments, based on up-to-the-minute information collected during their everyday duties. The Street Gang Unit also provides Gang Resistance Education and Training (GREAT) programming for elementary school students.

The New Jersey State Parole Board (SPB) is New Jersey’s lead reentry agency, and works to ensure ex-prisoners return to society as law-abiding citizens. As required by law, appointed Parole Board Members and staff conduct more than 20,000 hearings per year, solicit input from victims and decide parole matters. SPB’s sworn parole officers supervise more than 15,000 offenders statewide. In addition, SPB is New Jersey’s primary law enforcement agency responsible for sex offender supervision. SPB officers are also active partners with multiple Federal, State and local law enforcement agencies and task forces. Finally, SPB’s Community Programs Unit partners with government, non-profit and private agencies to connect ex-prisoners with vocational, mental health and related services, targeted to break the cycle and risk of crime.

Founded in 1918 and based in Princeton, the New Jersey Hospital Association provides its 115 members with advocacy, data, information, research and education.

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