



2 July 2017

To the Minister of Health of the Republic of Lithuania, Mr. Aurelijus Veryga

Dear Minister Veryga:

We are writing to you to express our deep concern with regard to the recent events which occurred in the psychiatric institution in Vilnius, where two Lithuanian businesswomen were caught organizing "training sessions" for people who wanted to improve their communication skills by engaging in conversations with psychiatric patients without their informed consent in exchange for consideration paid to this business¹. According to the information received from our members in Lithuania, seven of the patients involved in the "training sessions" were from acute wards, where patients are especially vulnerable and in particular need safeguards from the government aimed at protecting their dignity, privacy, informed consent and the right to anonymous healthcare. According to Professor Jonas Ruškus, member of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, several articles of the UN CRPD were violated in this case, such as the patients' right to privacy², personal freedom and security³, their right not to be exploited⁴, as well as the provisions of the UN Convention calling for the elimination of negative stereotypes about people with disabilities⁵.

We welcome the fact that an internal investigation has been initiated by the administration of the hospital, however we are concerned by the lack of a proper, independent assessment on behalf of organizations of professionals, such as the Lithuanian Psychiatry Association and organizations working on disability and psychosocial disability issues. At the same time, we fail to understand the decision of the the Vilnius University Ethics Committee which did not sanction or hold responsible A. Navickas, who had been previously found guilty by the Vilnius Municipality Commission and Parliamentary Commission. We believe that the people involved in this outrageous scheme must be properly punished and any reluctance in this case speaks about grave systemic problems which open the door to further

¹ <http://www.liberties.eu/en/news/psychiatric-patients-exploited>

² UN CRPD, Article 22

³ UN CRPD, Article 14 (1) (a)

⁴ UN CRPD, Article 16

⁵ UN CRPD, Article 8 (1) (a), (b)

human rights violations. We believe that this particular case should also be seen as an opportunity leading to public discussion, with the relevant statements from the government, aimed at raising public awareness on the rights of people with mental health conditions and challenging negative stereotypes. This type of action can only improve the reputation of the Lithuanian Government in the eyes of European States and all UN Members States in the field of human rights, and can also set an example.

We believe that the Lithuanian government is effectively investigating this case, however we would like to call for more publicity, transparency and a proper assessment on behalf of the Ministry of Health of Lithuania, condemning this “training course” as a grave violation of patients’ rights and explaining what the Lithuanian Ministry of Health intends to do to ensure the protection of the rights of persons with psychosocial disabilities in your country.

We naturally remain available for any questions or any advice you may need.

Yours sincerely,

On behalf of the ENUSP Board

Olga Kalina

Chair