

Dispatch Editorial: Better care for the vulnerable

Posted Sep 11, 2017 at 12:01 AM

Updated Sep 11, 2017 at 6:19 AM

Guardianship board is success story

When it comes to caring for the most vulnerable elderly and mentally ill, Franklin County can take pride in the Guardianship Service Board. It has helped remake a system that once permitted shameful exploitation of wards into one of the state's best.

A new agreement between the board and Ohio State University's Wexner Medical Center demonstrates how its impact can grow even more.

The hospital plans to pay the board \$65,000 to help secure guardians for patients who, because of dementia or mental illness, aren't competent to make decisions about their care and have no one else to do so. Such patients — between 15 and 20 per year at OSU — have been stuck in the hospital for months.

The guardianship board was formed a few years ago through state law to serve as a “guardian of last resort.” The move came after a Dispatch series, “Unguarded,” revealed that several lawyers appointed as guardians had failed to provide proper care while charging exorbitant fees. Wards were robbed of their property, dignity and even their freedom.

Among the board's first tasks was taking over guardianship of some of 400 wards assigned to lawyer Paul Kormanik. He'd pleaded guilty in August 2015 to four counts of stealing from wards, plus charges relating to taking taxpayers' money and falsifying records; he committed suicide less than a month before he was to be sentenced.

Since the reforms began, the board has accepted a \$25,000 gift from the Columbus Foundation to further its work. It also sought help from the Lawyer's Fund for Client Protection, and it won more than \$200,000 in restitution for 35 of Kormanik's swindled wards.

The newest partnership with the Wexner Medical Center could lead to similar arrangements with other hospitals. Most important, it means fewer central Ohioans will be left alone and confused in a strange place with no one assigned and specially trained to look out for them.