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# Prison health provider agrees to changes in California



By Dan Levine

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By Dan Levine

SAN FRANCISCO (Reuters) - One of the largest U.S. for-profit prison healthcare providers has agreed to change how it staffs California jails, part of a settlement announced on Tuesday that ends a wrongful death lawsuit against the company.

Corizon Health, a privately held firm which services more than 345,000 inmates in 27 states, was sued in 2011 after an inmate in Alameda County, California, outside San Francisco, died in jail. The inmate's family accused Corizon of failing to properly diagnose the inmate, who suffered from alcohol withdrawal and was allegedly beaten by guards.

Corizon and Alameda County also agreed to pay \$8.3 million, which the attorneys called the largest single civil rights wrongful death settlement in state history.

The quality of prisoner healthcare has long been an issue in the most populous U.S. state. California's statewide prison health system has been run by a court-appointed receiver for several years, and complaints about unsafe conditions in county jails are also common.

As part of the Corizon settlement announced on Tuesday, the company will stop using licensed vocational nurses to do the work of registered nurses, according to attorneys for the inmate's family. For every licensed vocational nurse that did the work of a registered nurse, Corizon saved 35 percent in costs,

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attorneys Michael Haddad and Julia Sherwin said in a statement.

Alameda County Sheriff Greg Ahern on Tuesday said the inmate, Martin Harrison, attacked prison guards and that Corizon has done "a fantastic job" for the institution.

"We got put in a very difficult spot," Ahern said, because the county faced the risk of an "exorbitant" judgment if it did not settle. "Things could have been done better and we are very sad it resulted in an inmate death."

In a statement, Corizon said Harrison did not alert the nurse he had a history of alcohol withdrawal. Corizon's clinical team has conducted nearly 500,000 intake screenings in the San Francisco area without a single death due to unmonitored alcohol withdrawal, the company said, adding that it is committed to inmate health.

The settlement currently impacts Corizon contracts in four California counties, though the company intends to grow in the state, the attorneys said.

(Reporting by Dan Levine; Editing by Andrew Hay, David Gregorio and Lisa Shumaker)

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Ah yes, Corizon - the same lovely outfit that provides what it laughingly calls medical care in Florida's prisons too. They've been associated with a more-than-doubled death rate since they began their 'beguine'. It's a story that just got extensive coverage in the Palm Beach Post, but unfor- More
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