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Tully Rinckey PLLC client Val Riviello discusses the latest on her case with the Daily Caller.

Nurse: VA Medical Staff Stole Morphine From Dying Patients

By: Patrick Howley

Vials of morphine were systematically stolen from a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center and replaced with water and saline so that dying veterans got the wrong treatments, a longtime VA nurse told The Daily Caller. "A nurse taking care of hospice patients over the past year had been diverting vials of morphine," said Valerie Riviello, a 28-year veteran nurse at the Albany Stratton VA Medical Center in Albany, New York. "Those patients that were dying in hospice were not getting their intended pain medication." Management became aware of the recurring theft without reporting it to higher levels of governance within the VA system, said Riviello, a Florence Nightingale Award winner for nursing. The nurse detailed visible abuse of a machine that dispenses medication. Hospital staff need to punch in a code to get medicine from the machine. Vials of morphine were being replaced with other ingredients, including saline and water. Records continued to show the accurate number of withdrawals from the machine, but morphine was not getting to the patients. The abuse was not noticed by management for about a year, according to Riviello. Albany Stratton VA Medical Center did not return a request for comment for this report. Albany is not the only VA medical center that allegedly struggles with medicine theft. Insiders told TheDC that Oklahoma City's inner city drug trade oozes with stolen goods from the Oklahoma City VA Medical Center. Riviello said that she was later punished in one of the numerous cases of VA whistleblower reprisal that occurred across the United States in

recent years. Riviello angered her superiors by removing a military sexual assault victim from bed restraints in November 2013. "We wanted to get her out of the restraints. It became apparent that she was in pain. She needed to go to the bathroom and be bathed. The nursing team took her out and gave her the care she deserved. She was cooperative. The first time we got her out after seven hours," Riviello said. Doctors "stonewalled" her release from restraint. Though Riviello's action was within the hospital's own policy for nurses, and though her superior told her that she did the right thing, Riviello said that she was "almost immediately" punished. "They basically removed me from my position as nurse manager and gave me a special project to work on for eight hours at a time," Riviello said. "They prevented me from having any patient contact." Riviello was later issued a formal reprimand for removing the patient from restraint and threatened with criminal or civil action by lawyers representing the VA for using patient medical records to defend herself in disciplinary hearings under the Whistleblower Act and other statutes. The patient, meanwhile, was held in restraints for another 49-hour interval in February 2014.