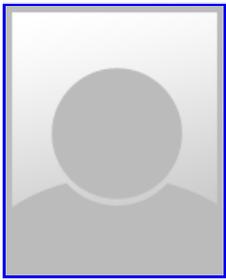


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We care about our patients

Published 2:47pm Friday, February 24, 2012

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I am an employee working for the State of Alabama Department of Mental Health. Oh, wait a minute. I forgot to tell you that I am very PROUD to be an Alabama State employee who works for Searcy Hospital in Mount Vernon, Ala. You are probably wondering where our voices have been. For the past week, the headlines have read, "State Mental Hospitals are closing." We've been a little quiet.

Well, to tell you the truth, we are really exhausted. I think I can speak for myself and 490 other employees at Searcy Hospital. We have spent the last few years working hard to be the best mental health facility in Alabama. It has been a rough time for us. We have been cajoled, challenged, and our numbers have been dwindled down to a select few under the direction of a facility director whose words to us every day are, "Do the right thing." The employees that remain are a talented and compassionate

group of people that I am proud to call my friends and co-workers.

Many of the public statements are sentiments for the direct care staff and administration concerning our jobs.

Don't worry about us! We'll be OK. Because did I tell you, we are the best at what we do? We'll find jobs. We have learned from an administration that didn't accept mediocrity. You had to be the best at what you did or move over, because there will always be someone else out there that wants our job.

In my opinion, our professional staff, the psychiatrists, medical docs, RNs, LPNs, and especially our mental health workers are a talented group that have learned to take care of and treat a population that can be very challenging. And we were led by an administration that is relentless in its pursuit of perfection.

I'm worried about my clients and where they are going to live. Are they going to be taken care of on a daily basis, as well as we take care of them at Searcy Hospital? Who is going to follow them around and chastise them about brushing their teeth? Who is going to insure that they take their medications, or they take care of their hygiene? Who is going to protect them from others who might take advantage of them? And most of all,

Who is going to KEEP THEM SAFE?

So far, the State of Alabama has no plan for the care of our clients once the hospitals have been closed. The legislature meets next week to discuss the budget. Please contact your local legislative members if you are as worried as I am about the future care of our clients.

I traveled to Montgomery recently, to sit down and talk to one of our more compassionate members of the legislature. After listening to our little group of medical professionals, he said, "You know, none of you have talked about your job security. You all seem to be talking about "the patients." Well, guess what! We care about our clients; they are members of our family. They are our parents, aunts, uncles, and children. And they are yours, too.

Dr. Roxanna Stewart

Searcy Hospital

Mount Vernon, Ala.

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