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## New mental health leader: Funding elusive for downsizing plans

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MONTGOMERY — Alabama's new mental health commissioner said the department remains committed to switching from a facility-based service organization to one that provides most of its care in the community.

Jim Reddoch, a veteran of the Department of Mental Health, was tapped by Gov. Robert Bentley to succeed Mental Health Commissioner Zelia Baugh on July 1. She resigned last month for family medical reasons.

"We have made tremendous progress in moving patients into a more modern, community-based care network," Bentley said when appointing Reddoch. "I believe Jim's wealth of experience will serve the state well, most importantly, the patients of the Alabama Department of Mental Health."

Reddoch, 66, is a finance graduate of the University of Alabama. He earned a law degree from Cumberland School of Law and was in private practice for 15 years. He literally was retired for two years when he was named as director of the Indian Rivers Mental Health Center in Tuscaloosa about five months ago.

Reddoch is no stranger to government or to the Department of Mental Health. He was deputy commissioner from 1988 to 1992 under former Gov. Guy Hunt, and was director of Bryce Hospital from 1992 to 2000. He served as director of the Taylor Hardin Secure Medical Facility in Tuscaloosa from 2000 to 2009.

Reddoch said he first met Bentley when Bentley served in the Legislature and had requested a tour of Bryce Hospital. Bentley was a Tuscaloosa physician in private practice before being elected governor in 2010. Reddoch said they would "run into each other from time to time."

"I think he was aware that I had had a lot of experience and a pretty broad knowledge base in the mental health field," Reddoch said last week. "From his own knowledge and his information probably from others, he probably thought it was a good fit."

Reddoch said Bentley discussed challenges facing the department that is smaller in both the number of patients and employees than when Reddoch first encountered it 24 years ago.

"The obvious one is the budget situation," he said. "He also mentioned that his goal is what he announced earlier, to downsize the institutional facilities and continue the additional focus on the expansion and enhancement of programs available in the community."

"We'll move toward total community integration to enable our clients to try to live as normal lives as possible," he said. "A great majority of them can do that with proper support."

Closing mental illness and mental retardation facilities began in the 1990s. Hundreds of employees began to be laid off, including in Tuscaloosa at the W.D. Partlow Developmental Center. Thousands of patients began the transition to community treatment.



Reddoch said there are no more immediate layoffs planned for Tuscaloosa.

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Bentley is continuing the goal of closing the Searcy Hospital in Mount Vernon and the Greil Memorial Psychiatric Hospital in Montgomery, and placing as many of their patients as possible in community settings. “He of course asked that I focus on continuing that assignment,” Reddoch said.

Bentley’s plans include continued operation of the North Alabama Regional Hospital in Decatur and the Taylor Hardin Secure Medical Facility and the Mary Starke Harper Geriatric Center, both in Tuscaloosa, and construction of the new Bryce mental illness hospital in Tuscaloosa. It will replace Bryce Hospital, which will remain in operation until the new facility opens sometime in 2013.