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New crisis beds sought with Greil's closing

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(Corrected from earlier version: See note below)

The closing of Greil Hospital at the end of this month also means the loss nine crisis beds at the facility.

State and local officials hope to meet the needs with a new 16-bed facility, scheduled to open by Aug. 17. The move also could save the state money.

"In a 16-bed facility, I can bill Medicaid," said Henry Parker, executive director of the Montgomery Area Mental Health Authority, which contracts with the state Department of Mental Health to operate the beds. "A state hospital cannot bill Medicaid for any reason."

The beds are used for individuals undergoing a psychiatric crisis, which can include individuals who are becoming a danger to themselves or other people. Individuals are evaluated by professionals to determine the proper course of treatment.

"They're all designed to take care of patients in the early days of their crisis, and either get them out of a state hospital quicker or get them into one quicker," said Jim Deal, executive director of the Alabama Council of Community Mental Health Boards.

Will O'Rear, a Montgomery attorney and vice president with the National Alliance on Mental Illness Alabama, said the crisis units were more likely to find individuals community treatment options, instead of moving patients into hospitals. Patients are charged on a sliding scale, depending on household income.

"We really don't need that (long-term hospitalization) anymore," he said. "We need short-term crisis beds."

The Department of Mental Health announced the closing of Greil earlier this year as part of a plan to cuts costs and move patients into community care centers. Greil currently houses 62 patients and employs 119 workers. Its closing date is set for Aug. 31.

The department said that patients who would not meet the requirements for community-care facilities would be transferred into other state hospitals.

The Mental Health Authority already operates eight beds on the campus of Jackson Hospital. Parker said moving the crisis beds into community care could cut the yearly cost of treatment for individuals in the crisis centers from about \$120,000 per year to \$60,000.

Jeff Shackelford, a spokesman for the Alabama Department of Mental Health, said they were working with local officials to work out the situation.

Reese McKinney, Montgomery County's Judge of Probate, said maintaining services was a priority.

"I fully expect the state of Alabama to provide the necessary tools and resources to provide adequate mental health treatment," McKinney said. "They are in a position to do that, and I know we expect them to deliver facilities to treat the mentally ill in our community."

A message left with Jackson Hospital was not returned Tuesday. Parker indicated the Mental Health

Authority would operate the facility on Jackson's grounds.

"They're going to be like any other crisis beds," Parker said. "The goal is crisis stabilization. And to get the people into the community and living with their families."

(Corrected at 11:04 a.m. Jackson Hospital says the facility will not be operated on its campus. Parker says the new facility will be in the community, but will not be located on the campus.)
