



## Searcy Hospital set to close as some psychiatric patients transition to community-based programs

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By



Searcy Hospital in Mount Vernon, Ala.

**MOBILE, Alabama** -- With a new target date for closing Searcy Hospital set for Oct. 31, mental health officials in Mobile said they have been working with staff at the Mount Vernon site to determine which patients should transition to local residential and acute care programs.

Tuerk Schlesinger, CEO of AltaPointe Health System in Mobile, said about 60 percent of patients not moving to other facilities in central Alabama are expected to move into acute care, residential treatment and outpatient treatment programs in Mobile and Baldwin County.

Those programs will operate under the AltaPointe umbrella, he said.

AltaPointe operates psychiatric hospitals in Mobile and Daphne and more than 20 group homes. The company also is looking to hire medical staff now working at Searcy, Schlesinger said, and has been presenting job fairs to recruit experienced employees.

"We've hired some (Searcy staff) but we are trying to hire as many as we can get," Schlesinger said. "We are looking for qualified people who want to be in the human services field."

Part of the Retirement System of Alabama, he said, former Searcy employees would be able to continue within the retirement system. As of Aug. 31, there were 291 people working at Searcy, caring for 193 patients.

Established in 1902, Searcy Hospital provides care for adult psychiatric patients in south Alabama. Of the patients there now, about half hail from the Mobile area.

In February, the state announced a plan to shutter Searcy and Greil Memorial Psychiatric Hospital in Montgomery. Greil closed Aug. 31, state health official said.

Such closures have been a longtime goal of the state Department of Mental Health, so that patients could flow into community-based treatment programs, putting them closer to their homes and families and to familiar surroundings.

"It's going to dramatically impact our two hospitals," Schlesinger said. "We will be doing basically all of the Searcy operations for acute care."

For many mental health patients, acute care typically involves getting someone stabilized within a set time period, such as 30 days, health officials said.

As the transition from Searcy begins, some long-term care patients will move to Bryce and others will go into group care, Schlesinger said.

"We clinically identified some of the individuals who could not go to community-based care and are in the process of transferring those patients," he said. "We're going to replicate the acute care Searcy has offered."

Of AltaPointe's 106 beds designated for acute care within its two hospitals, 35 will be available for Searcy patients and those who have been committed.

Said Schlesinger: "I think the community should understand that the clinically-appropriate levels of care these individuals were treated at are still going to be the levels of care they are treated at in the community."

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