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## Bentley: North Alabama Regional Hospital to stay open

By Mary Sell Montgomery Bureau

North Alabama Regional Hospital in Decatur will remain open under Gov. Robert Bentley's new plan for the state's mental health facilities.

Bentley and Department of Mental Health Commissioner Zelia Baugh announced their revised plan today, almost two months after they said the 147-employee Decatur facility and others would close to save money.

Numerous patients from the Shoals use the Decatur facility.

Under the new plan, mental health hospitals in Montgomery and Mount Vernon will close.

Bentley has also ordered work to continue on a new Bryce Hospital in Tuscaloosa. He stopped the work last month, saying it didn't make sense to build a new hospital when others were closing.

"The new Bryce Hospital will be scheduled to open in the fall of 2013, and we believe the plan for the facility is best for patients and the surrounding community," Bentley said in a written statement. "While there have been budget challenges, the top priorities in every decision we make are patient care and public safety. We believe this plan addresses the challenges facing the state while also ensuring quality care."

Information about how North Alabama Regional's mission may change was not immediately available this afternoon. The hospital serves patients from 20 north Alabama counties.

Baugh wants most of the state's mental health patients moved from the institutions to community-based providers. He has met with community-level providers around the state to determine if they have enough resources to absorb the patients currently in hospitals.

In February, Baugh recommended closing the Decatur hospital, as well as facilities in Tuscaloosa, Montgomery and Mount Vernon. In all, about 948 ADMH employees would have been laid off statewide and at least 473 hospital residents moved.