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Bryce Hospital will lay off 34 staffers due to budget woes

By Dana Beyerle, Montgomery Bureau Chief
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MONTGOMERY | The Department of Mental Health said Monday it will be laying off staff at Bryce Hospital in Tuscaloosa but the final number of jobs lost will partly be determined by attrition.

The department on Jan. 25 submitted a plan to cut 34 positions at Bryce — 29 merit and five non-merit positions, according to the state Personnel Department. Non-merit positions are considered at-will positions.



File | Dusty Compton / The Tuscaloosa News
Bryce Hospital is seen at its old location in 2009.

Mental health department spokesman John Ziegler said Monday that 16 of the 34 positions are currently filled. "The final number of actual layoffs will depend on retirements and attrition within that group between now and March 1, 2012," he said.

The number of patients at Bryce has dropped over the past several years from an average of 325 per day to between 225 and 250 a day, Ziegler said.

"This reduction was, in large part, due to a planned outplacement project where community services were established to accommodate former extended care patients at Bryce," he said. Similar patient moves were done at Searcy Hospital in Mt. Vernon, Ziegler said.

Most of the layoffs at Bryce were concentrated in supervisory mental health worker II positions.

In notifying the state Personnel Department of anticipated reductions, the mental health department chief operating officer David Jackson said this year's budget was an "unprecedented shortfall." The department had to cut at least \$30 million in spending this year.

"This fiscal situation has forced us to continue to re-examine nearly every aspect of our operations in search of ways to operate more effectively and efficiently," Jackson wrote to the personnel board.

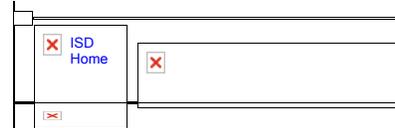
He said a review of staffing at Bryce and Searcy, the system's largest hospitals, determined the most efficient way to deliver services.

"As a result of the review, additional positions will need to be eliminated at Bryce Hospital," he wrote. "Regrettably, to achieve this, additional employees will be subject to lay off effective March 1, 2012."

Jackson said all layoffs stemming from the closure of W.D. Partlow Developmental Center late last year were expected to be completed by Feb. 1. He said the Bryce layoffs are new layoffs.

He said the department will determine who will be laid off by using retention scores for employees based on their classification. He said written notification of layoffs

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would be sent to employees at least 10 working days in advance of their actual layoff date.

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The merit positions subject to layoffs are three account clerks, a lab technician II, a librarian supervisor, 22 mental health II workers and two mental health III workers.