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LETTER: Department of Mental Health is clueless

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Dear Editor: In 1970, the Alabama Department of Mental Health dismissed the professional staff at Bryce. A courageous group of professionals and patient advocates responded by filing actions on behalf of Ricky Wyatt and other patients. There followed a series of rulings by Judge Frank Johnson establishing a right to treatment for the mentally ill. Elements of the state government have tried to abandon that task ever since. They are apparently on the verge of success except for the troubling details reported by The Tuscaloosa News on March 5. They have no plan.

ADMH is closing the inpatient unit but "at this time, we do not have an estimate of the needs of the state or any particular community" says their spokesman. (Translation — we don't know what we are doing.) While awaiting the fate of 470 people (a gross underestimate, by the way) we are provided with platitudes about how much the administration cares for these people and how community care is better. Of course, there isn't any community care to speak of and most of the people involved have already failed community placement.

Maybe now we know why the commissioner didn't show for her meeting with the mayor. Apparently, she has nothing to say. Since no one seems to know what they are doing and since the well-being of the patients and the community are at stake, maybe ADMH needs to start over.

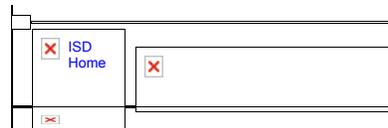
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