

## **EDITORIAL: Bryce deserving of funding, upkeep**

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It is hard to look at the stately old domed Bryce Hospital building and think of it as state of the art. But at the time of its construction, it was a model for the nation in the treatment of mental illness.

More than 150 years later, the hospital's home is again a state-of-the-art facility. Soon the 268-bed hospital will be filled with patients. Much has changed over the years, and it's a little easier for us, through 21st-century eyes, to see the recently completed facility constructed on the W.D. Partlow Developmental Center campus as the latest in mental health care.

"This is one of the most fantastic facilities I have ever seen," said Gov. Robert Bentley during a recent tour.

From its high point as a national model in the 1860s, the hospital's population eventually swelled to 5,000 patients. Thousands of acres of farmland in Tuscaloosa County helped support the hospital.

But it's time as a model facility was limited. By the early 1970s, neglect led to terrible conditions. U.S. District Judge Frank Johnson intervened and his court orders led to massive reforms.

Now, most mental health treatment is administered by community-based mental health care. But there is still a need for a facility like Bryce. Some have argued that an even larger facility is needed.

"There is something about Bryce Hospital. It gets in your blood," said Mental Health Commissioner Jim Reddoch. "It becomes a part of you. It stays with you the rest of your life."

With 500 employees and a \$32 million annual operating budget, Bryce Hospital is still a major source of jobs in Tuscaloosa County. When the University of Alabama first proposed buying the facility, many local officials were concerned that the hospital would move elsewhere. Former Gov. Bob Riley even toyed with the idea of relocating the facility to a Birmingham hospital building.

Fortunately, that did not happen, and Bryce will remain a part of Tuscaloosa for some time to come. It is an important facility to the entire state, and we hope that it receives the attention and funding that it deserves.

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