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Promoting awareness of mental illness

Conference will look at mental health from different perspectives

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TUSCALOOSA | A free conference will be held Thursday focusing on the future of mental health in Alabama.

The conference, sponsored by the Mental Health Task Force of West Alabama, will look at the future of mental health from several perspectives: a mental health consumer's perspective, a mental health provider's perspective and the perspective of people who are involved in government or law enforcement, said Kathryn Adams of the Mental Health Task force.

"The task force has done conferences like this in the past, but it's been several years since we've put on this sort of thing," Adams said.

The event is being held during the National Mental Illness Awareness Week, which ends Saturday.

One in four adults will experience a mental health problem in any given year, and more than one in 17 people live with a serious, chronic illness, according to the Alabama Department of Mental Health.

The department serves more than 100,000 Alabamians with mental illness each year, with about 97 percent of those individuals living in the community.

"Many people in our communities are directly affected by mental illnesses," said Dr. Beverly Bell-

Shambley, associate commissioner of the ADMH's Division of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services. "The good news is treatment works and recovery is possible, but only if people can get access to that treatment."

Jim Reddoch, the new ADMH commissioner, will speak at the conference, as well as the department's medical director, Timothy Stone. Tuscaloosa County Probate Judge Hardy McCollum, Sheriff Ted Sexton, Circuit Judge Brad Almond and Connie Robins, acting director of Indian Rivers Mental Health Center, will also be part of the discussion.

"We will look at the future of mental health in Alabama from several angles," Adams said.

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Dusty Compton | The Tuscaloosa News

Construction continues on the adult psychiatric facility at the site of the former Partlow hospital in Tuscaloosa on Tuesday. The new facility will have 268 beds and will open in the fall of 2013. A conference will be held Thursday at University Church of Christ to discuss the future of mental health care in Alabama.

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