

Decatur Hospital Closing



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Decatur, AL-The North Alabama Regional Hospital will be closing its doors by the end of September. The Alabama Department of Mental Health made the announcement Wednesday and says the closures are due to state budget cuts. The hospital, located in Decatur, services more than 80 patients and employs 146 people. The department says the aging facilities must be closed to avoid budget cuts to smaller community based facilities.



North Alabama Regional Hospital

Many of the people treated at the Regional Hospital are sent there through the court system. Probate Judge Greg Cain, who makes commitments to the hospital, says the closures will greatly affect his court procedures.

"What are we going to do with the people that are mentally sick and are dealing with those symptoms and do by evidence presented exhibit a danger to themselves or others...what are we going to do with them," he said.

A representative from the Department says the plan is to move patients into smaller community based treatment facilities. Cain says not everyone can be treated at outpatient centers.

"Commitment to a state hospital is a last resort. It is only for those people that are a danger to themselves or others," he explained.

He says that the change will have a big affect on his court processes; but what those affects are has not yet been determined.

"That is what is concerning to us, is that there are a lot of unanswered questions about how does this affect our commitment process and how does this affect our court? The bottom line is how this going to affect the families that are dealing with a loved one that has got a mental illness that needs help?"

Few answers are forthcoming; but as of now people will be transported to Bryce Hospital in Tuscaloosa, the only hospital remaining open. The impact will not only be on the court system, with 146 people potentially losing their jobs, the closure is a financial blow as well. Cain says people drive from as far away as Cullman County to work at the facility.

“The loss of jobs is another concern. Obviously this will have a financial impact,” the Judge said.

There is a chance that some of the employees can remain, if a new department takes control of the center. Cain says the Department of Corrections may utilize the building.

“We have been told is that there is a possibility that it could be used as a hospital, kind of a secure hospital, for the prison system.”

The decision has not yet been made. Right now, Cain says, the questions far outnumber the answers.

“Now that they have made this announcement, where do we go from here?”