

Bentley announces new mental health plans

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TUSCALOOSA, Ala. (WALA) - Governor Robert Bentley on Friday detailed long-range plans for the treatment of patients within the Alabama Department of Mental Health. The Governor was joined by Mental Health Commissioner Zelia Baugh.

"A month ago, I ordered construction of the new Bryce Hospital to stop while we carefully evaluated the needs of patients served by the Department of Mental Health and our long-term plans for patient care in Alabama," Governor Bentley said. "We have also spoken with and listened to the concerns of several stakeholders, including family members, community mental health centers, probate judges, sheriffs, and local and state officials.

"The discussions we have had have contributed to a plan that prioritizes patient care and makes the best use of the resources we have available. I want to thank all the stakeholders involved for their cooperation during this period of evaluation."

The long-range plan includes the following details:

- Resuming construction of the Bryce facility. The original plan for this 268-bed facility will continue.
- Moving patients at the current Bryce facility into the new Bryce facility upon completion. The patient population at the new Bryce facility will reflect the current classifications of patients at the current Bryce facility.
- Keeping the Taylor Hardin Secure Medical Facility open
- Keeping the North Alabama Regional Hospital open
- Keeping the Mary Starke Harper Geriatric Psychiatry Center open
- Closing Searcy and Greil Memorial Hospitals

"The new Bryce Hospital will be scheduled to open in the fall of 2013, and we believe the plan for the facility is best for patients and the surrounding community," Governor Bentley said. "While there have been budget challenges, the top priorities in every decision we make are patient care and public safety. We believe this plan addresses the challenges facing the state while also ensuring quality care."

In keeping with the state's overall plan to provide a network of community-based care, Searcy and Greil Hospitals will eventually close. There is no deadline for hospital closures. The hospitals will only close as patients are safely transferred to new, community-based settings that will provide appropriate levels of care.

"Our plan to strengthen community services will benefit the patients we serve," Commissioner Baugh said. "Our comprehensive plan has been crafted with patient care as the top priority while modernizing services and ensuring the long-term vitality of the Department of Mental Health."

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