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Construction of new Bryce hospital will resume

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TUSCALOOSA, AL (WBRC) - The construction of a new Bryce Hospital for mental health patients will resume, Governor Bentley said Thursday. Bentley and the Mental Health Commissioner Zelia Baugh held a press conference Friday afternoon to announce long-range plans for the Alabama Department of Mental Health.

"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.

Bentley says he took into consideration the concerns of "several stakeholders, including family members, community mental health centers, probate judges, sheriffs, and local and state officials" before deciding there should still be a state-run mental health hospital in Tuscaloosa.

Mental Health Commissioner Zelia Baugh said, "This is an excellent compromise and the first time to build a state-of-the-art facility."

The decision to continue construction on Bryce means jobs will be kept in Tuscaloosa, something local leaders wanted. The new hospital, located on the Partlow campus, is a \$73 million project and will hold 268 beds. It is expected to open in the fall of 2013.

Other details in the long-range plan for the state include:



-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 (hospital for the criminally insane) open

-Keeping the North Alabama Regional Hospital open

-Keeping the Mary Starke Harper Geriatric Psychiatry Center open

-Closing Searcy and Greil Memorial Hospitals

There is no deadline set for the closure of Searcy, a south Alabama hospital, or Greil Hospital in Montgomery. Those hospitals will only close "as patients are safely transferred to new, community-based settings that will provide appropriate levels of care," according to a release from the Governor's office.

The new hospital is being rebuilt in an area devastated by the April 27 tornado. Tuscaloosa Mayor Walt Maddox said the new Bryce will be an economic engine will help the area redevelop

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