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Mental health hospital shuts doors, patients moved

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MONTGOMERY, AL (WSFA) - 60 people are out of a job as a state health facility shuts its doors. Greil Hospital on Upper Wetumpka Road closed August 31st. It's all part of a plan to reduce the state mental health department's expenses. But some staff members believe it will hurt the community.

"Almost disbelief," says Dr. James Edwards, a psychiatrist at Greil Hospital.

Dr. Edwards fears losing the hospital could hurt the community.

"Seems to be one of the only ones in the central part of the state. A hospital facility that's really going to be missed I think because there aren't enough hospital beds in the area."

He doesn't understand why the facility must close when the state pays very little to use the building.

"I personally don't see how it could be cost effective."

"It is not the facility cost it's the operational cost," says State Mental Health Commissioner Jim Reddoch.

Reddoch says operating Greil Hospital costs \$10-million dollars per year. It's money he admits isn't in the budget.



Closing Greil and Searcy Hospital in Mobile County should save the department roughly \$20-million dollars each year.

But what happens to the patients?

"They've gone to group homes, intermediate care homes, crisis stabilization units," adds Reddoch.

Some have also been transferred to other state hospitals.

"They all have a place to go. They all have after care supports in place when they walk out the door."

But even that care could be in jeopardy pending the outcome of the statewide vote on a proposed constitutional amendment to take money from a state savings account to balance the General Fund budget.

If it isn't passed, Reddoch says the savings generated from closing the hospital wouldn't make any difference.

"This is a critical vote for the future of our state."

The Mental Health Department is currently diverting some of the savings to community mental health centers so when they receive patients from the closed hospitals, these centers have the funds to care for them.

There are no current plans for the Greil Hospital building. Officials say they have considered using it for community health services, but haven't made a decision.

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