



MONTANA ADVOCACY PROGRAM, INC.

The Civil Rights Protection & Advocacy System for the State of Montana

Main Office

400 North Park Avenue
P.O. Box 1681
Helena, Montana 59624
406-449-2344 Voice/TDD
406-449-2418 FAX
E-mail:
advocate@mtadv.org

Visit us on the web at:
www.mtadv.org

Missoula Office

1280 S. 3rd Street West
Suite 4
Missoula, Montana 59801
406-541-4357 Voice/TDD
406-541-4360 FAX

Executive Director

Bernadette Franks-Ongoy
Esquire

Board of Directors

Bob Liston
President
Missoula

Gay Moddrell
Vice President
Kalispell

Sylvia Danforth
Secretary/Treasurer
Miles City

Richard Emery, Ph.D.
Helena

Dustin Hankinson
Missoula

John Martin, Esq.
Great Falls

Diana Tavary
Helena

Susie McIntyre
Advisory Council Chair
Great Falls

January 31, 2007

The Hon. Rep. Dave Kasten, Chair
Joint Appropriations Subcommittee for Long-Range Planning

RE: STEP proposal

Dear Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

As the Committee considers whether to authorize the creation of still more institutional beds in Warm Springs, we ask that you remember a similar appropriations request over a decade ago.

Back then, Hospital administrators argued that they could not deliver quality care in the existing buildings, which included the still-new Xanthapoulos Building. The X-building was characterized then as a difficult environment in which to deliver psychiatric hospital care.

NAMI-Montana and other advocates vigorously opposed the appropriation, arguing that those 135 new beds were needed in our communities—all across Montana—and not in Warm Springs.

Those community beds never did get built. In fact, since 1995, the number of local, secure psychiatric beds has shrunk drastically, and the crisis in our communities has deepened. The Montana Hospital Association has testified that there is a high likelihood that Montana will lose another in-patient psychiatric service over the next biennium.

MAP believes that STEP is another step on a dead end road. STEP increases the capacity at the State Hospital. When 60 forensic patients and their staff move to the STEP program, the vacated beds will quickly be filled by patients unable to access community services, including former STEP patients. No one we've spoken to about this proposal, including Department administrators, believes that the State Hospital census will stabilize as a result of STEP.

Instead of STEP, we ask that the Committee appropriate these funds for the creation of Behavioral Health Inpatient Facilities in our communities, where they are so badly needed. BHIF's are Medicaid-eligible, secure psychiatric in-patient facilities where voluntary or civilly committed patients can be served for up to several weeks. Patients are closer to home, they recover faster, their in-patient stays are shorter, and their lives are less disrupted. BHIF's will provide relief to courts, jails, law enforcement officers, emergency rooms, the State Hospital, families and above all

TOLL FREE 1-800-245-4743

Psychiatric unit opens Monday in Baxter

By MIKE O'ROURKE
Associate Editor

BAXTER, MN - The newest neighbor on Baxter's Grand Oaks Drive - a 16-bed psychiatric hospital - is on track to open Monday.

Administrator Dick Slieter said the hospital will be a secure site that will provide a safe, healing environment for mentally ill people who find themselves in an acute or emergency situation. It will not be a site to treat violent or dangerously mentally ill patients, he said.

"If you take a look at them," Slieter said of the patients, "they look like you and me."

The 17,000-square-foot hospital has private rooms, exam rooms, a nurses' station and a patio enclosed by a non-climbable 10-foot fence.

Some neighbors voiced concerns when they learned the state-operated hospital would be located in their neighborhood stating it posed a risk to public safety, there was lack of long-range planning by Baxter and other locations were better suited for the facility.

Steve Schaitberger, a Grand Oaks Drive resident who lives about five blocks from the hospital, was one of several neighbors who voiced concerns about the location of the hospital. He said Monday he believed the hospital would have been more suitable for a commercial or a hospital zone.

Schaitberger said, at this point, the neighbors have to place their faith in city officials, including the Baxter police chief, who said he did not believe it would lead to a safety issue.

"What's my comfort level?" Schaitberger asked. "I don't think I want to share that."

He said his neighbors don't stay in touch nearly as much in the winter as they do in other seasons so it was difficult to assess the feelings of other opponents to the project now.

"I don't think there's been a lot of change," he said. "It's a reality. The concerns are still there."

Conditions placed upon the hospital by the city of Baxter include the installation of security cameras; the formation of a neighborhood advisory committee; the understanding that it will not be used as a detoxification or chemical dependency center; the understanding that pedophiles or other patients with a sexually related diagnosis will not receive treatment for such illnesses at the hospital; and the understanding that the facility will not provide services to patients who need an evaluation to determine ability to stand trial or who need to be treated to stand trial or who have been committed as mentally ill and dangerous, or sexually psychopathic personality or a sexually dangerous person.

"We will work very hard to earn the trust and confidence of the neighbors and the entire community," Slieter said.

Slieter, 58, has been a hospital administrator for 35 years. This is his first job as a state employee. Slieter's most recent job was a seven-year stint at a hospital/nursing home in Marshall. His staff, he said, is "very seasoned." Many of them have experience at the Brainerd Regional Human Services Center but the entire staff has had nearly a month of training leading up to the hospital's opening, according to Slieter.

The staff will be made up of about 40 people with a full-time equivalency of 33, Slieter said. The staff will include psychiatrists, nurse practitioners, registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, human service technicians, social workers, occupational therapists and others, Slieter said. The core values that will be emphasized by his team are integrity, respect for others, safety/security and focusing on the needs and wants of the patients and their families, he said.

Slieter said the aesthetics of the hospital will help make it a healing environment.

"Persons do best when they're in the least restrictive environment," Slieter said. "Being in an institution is not always the best way to be healed. Patients do best when given the most freedom."

Patients' freedom, however will be balanced with the building's security features. Slieter said admission in and out of the building will be restricted. Employees will use a swipe card.

Patients will rarely leave the facility until they are deemed ready to leave unless it's for a medical reason or if they are judged to be ready for a transitional pass for a visit home.

The hospital administrator said the hospital will only treat adults (age 18 and older) who are in a stable medical condition. Violent and/or dangerous mentally ill patients will continue to be sent to a security hospital in St. Peter. Slieter said that if a patient was judged to be violent and/or dangerous the person could only be held at the Baxter psychiatric hospital for a period of 24 hours.

The more typical patient, Slieter said, will be someone with a mental illness who needs help for a limited period of time.

The goal, according to the Baxter hospital administrator, is for patients to be released after an average stay of between 15-20 days. Some patients, he said, might stay as long as 30-45 days.

The Baxter hospital is one of 10 similarly sized facilities that have been built or are being built throughout the state. Similar facilities can be found in Bemidji, Rochester, Wadena and Willmar. Six 16-bed hospitals are up and running, Slieter said, and Baxter's hospital will be the seventh. In total, the hospitals will offer 160 acute care beds statewide for the mentally ill and Slieter said those new beds, in addition to 200 beds at the Anoka Metro Regional Treatment Center and those in other community-based settings, should be enough to meet the demand. He said there has been a decline in the use of institutions by the mentally ill in recent years, in part because of the number of new medications that are available to treat mental illness.

The new hospitals are partnerships between the state and developers. Slieter said the building will be owned by private entities, leased to the state and state-run.

Slieter said the new model of smaller psychiatric hospitals allows mentally ill to be treated in locations closer to families and support systems. He said patients seem to respond favorably to the atmosphere of the neighborhood-based facilities.

"Health care is all about relationships," he said. "It's all about confidence and trust."

MIKE O'ROURKE can be reached at mike.orourke@brainerddispatch.com or 855-5860.
Click here to return to story:

http://www.brainerddispatch.com/stories/012407/new_20070124038.shtml