

# Analysis: County mental health system a failure

BY WAYNE PEAL  
STAFF WRITER

A scathing new report about Oakland County's mental health care system apparently comes as no surprise to those who use the system.

"They really don't have any good, well-run programs," said Bill Hayes of Birmingham, whose son has been part of the county system for 15 years.

An outside evaluation concluded the county mental health patients spent too much time in hospitals, too little in community-based programs.

It also concluded too many patients are being "warehoused" instead of treated.

"Everything that the study concluded — we've experienced," Hayes said.

"There's a lack of crisis manage-

ment programs, a lack of housing and no help for those who are also substance abusers."

The situation is bad, not only for patients but for county taxpayers, said Sue Carter of the Alliance for the Mentally Ill.

"It's been shown time and again that community-based services are the most effective services," Carter said. "At the same time, hospital services are by far more expensive."

The study found roughly 70 percent of the county mental health budget was being spent on hospital care; 30 percent for community programs. It argued the figures should be reversed.

The Alliance sponsored the \$15,000 study. It was compiled by Dr. Leonard Stein, a Wisconsin-based psychiatric care expert.

The Alliance, an advocacy group for patients and their relatives, is suing the county and state over the quality of mental health care in Oakland County.

County officials say the problem lies with inadequate state financing.

"Quite probably, we're going to be using this report to try to get more money from Lansing," said Richard Cooper, director of Oakland County Mental Health Services, the

county mental health care agency.

But Carter said the money is there, it just isn't being spent properly.

"They're putting the money into things like an 800 hot line for smokers and substance abuse programs," Carter said. "These are mental health issues, but they don't directly involve mental illness."

County and state officials are currently negotiating a new "full management" agreement giving Oakland greater control over mental health programs.

The initial session, held Thursday, went "very well," Cooper said.

All sides agree greater county control could ease problems, but it could also mean greater county spending.

"The state is of the opinion that Oakland County is a wealthy county, but we're already paying a lot for mental health care as it is," said County Commissioner Marilyn Gosling, R-Bloomfield Hills, a member community mental health services board.

The state is paying more than \$56 million for Oakland County mental health programs, the report said.

Though the state currently picks

up 90 percent of the tab, Gosling said, the county will spend about \$7 million on mental health care this year.

For Hayes, this issue is services,

not money.

"We expect to help, but we can't do it alone," Hayes said. "We need mental health professionals and programs."

## Area code from page 5A

The committee looked at whether plans were technically feasible, accommodated long-term growth, and offered easily recognizable boundaries.

O'Connor said only one plan, made sense from the standpoint of ease of recognition.

Twenty-five other metropolitan regions — including New York, Chicago, Los Angeles and San Francisco — have added area codes in recent years.

Officials from these areas have expressed the need for extensive public education.

"We'll be talking plenty about it

over the next two years to make sure everybody is familiar with it and ready for it when it takes effect," said Sawka.

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