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# Tug of war

## County, state wrestle over mental health patients

By Wayne Peal  
 staff writer

A proposed mental health care agreement between Oakland County and the state is drawing fire — even before county and state officials sit down at the negotiating table.

The state is trying to get Oakland to assume greater control over mental health care programs, as all but one other Michigan county has already done.

But while county commissioners worry Oakland could be stuck with a huge mental health care bill, relatives of county mental health county residents worry about cutbacks in services.

County community mental health director Richard Cooper will head

for Lansing within the next few weeks, accompanied by county attorneys and financial officers.

"WE'RE GOING to try to get the best agreement we can," Cooper said.

Talks are clearly the state's idea — not that of the county. In essence, the state is getting out of mental health care management.

At stake is the future of roughly 4,500 mental health care patients, including those served through Clinton Valley Center, Pontiac, as well as other state programs.

Also at stake is the future of the Macomb Oakland Regional Center, supervising body for area-group homes and their estimated 1,400 residents.

Patients could be released from state care into community-based programs. Programs run by the state could also be assumed by the county. But county officials say they'd like some guarantees first.

"As we bring people out of Clinton Valley Center, we want to make sure there's a dollar shift," Cooper said. In short, the county wants no cutback in state aid.

In addition, the county wants a \$450,000 state grant to hire new mental health staff.

DESPISE NEGOTIATIONS, there is no guarantee county commissioners would approve the agreement.

Commissioner Marilyn Gosling, R-Bloomfield Hills, said the county should be allowed to assign patients to private mental hospitals.

Private hospitals are less expensive than Clinton Valley, patients stays there are shorter and the county would be able to qualify for Medicaid, Gosling said.

The state currently pays 50 percent of Oakland County's \$120 million mental health care budget, a trend county officials would like to see continue.

"Health professionals and family members, however, are skeptical present levels of care would continue."

"The mentally ill of Oakland County have been shortchanged ever since there was deinstitutionalization," said Delores Howell of the Al-

liance for the Mentally Ill, Southfield. "We want to make sure that if people are taken out of Clinton Valley there's money to put them in the community."

Alliance members have already named the state and county in a civil suit, that seeks more money for mental health programs.

Because the Macomb Oakland Regional Center is itself a state agency, officials aren't speaking for the record. But privately, they say they're concerned about their agency's future.

"THIS ISN'T ABOUT saving our jobs," said one MORC staffer, who asked not to be named. "It's that Oakland County has never been a very hospitable place for group homes."

Relatives of group home residents are concerned MORC could be replaced by several private agencies.

"MORC already has all the expertise, all the staff, all the support services. Why replace that?" said Southfield resident Henry Wlarczyk, a member of MORC's parents' board.

Even if the county and state agreed on a new mental health contract — and even if the county commission approved — it's unclear just how soon changes would begin.

Gosling estimated it could take "three to five years" to transfer programs from state to county control.

### EMEAC land use confab set

Former Michigan Supreme Court Justice Dennis Archer will be the opening speaker Friday, May 1, at a land use conference called by the East Michigan Environmental Action Council.

The council predicts a 40 percent increase in construction by the year 2010, accompanied by a mere 6 percent increase in population.

It also predicts area freeway congestion will double at that time, with residents driving 40 percent further each day and spending 50 percent more time in their cars.

The conference seeks regional solutions to these and other area development problems. It is also designed to answer questions about the controversial Regional Development Initiative, released last year through the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments.

The conference is scheduled for 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. at the Michigan State University Management Conference Center, 811 W. Square Lake Road, Troy. Fee is \$75. To register, or for additional information, call the EMEAC office, 258-5188.

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