



North Alabama Regional Hospital in Decatur closing its doors after 38 years

hospital bed.JPG

(File photo)

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DECATUR, Alabama -- North Alabama Regional Hospital, the only state-run mental hospital in the Tennessee Valley, will soon close its doors.

Beverly Bell-Shambley, associate commissioner of the **Alabama Department of Mental Health**, told **AL.com** that the announcement was made Tuesday to the hospital's 149 employees. The projected close date is on or before June 30.

The closure is in line with the state's ongoing efforts to streamline the way it handles mental health by transitioning patients into community-based programs near their homes instead of state institutions.

"We've been downsizing and closing facilities for a number of years," Bell-Shambley said.

The most recent closures were in 2012, when both **Greil Memorial Psychiatric Hospital in Montgomery** and **Searcy Hospital in Mount Vernon**.

[Related story: Old Searcy Hospital cemetery holds hundreds of graves from decades past; records no longer exist, officials say]

Currently, North Alabama Regional has 41 patients, Bell-Shambley said. The hospital, which was established in 1977, has the capacity for 74 patients.

The goal now for hospital staff is as it always is, she said.

"They will do what they do every day in terms of stabilizing patients and working toward transferring them out to the most appropriate community resources for them," Bell-Shambley said.

Hospital staff will remain employees of the state, but will be transferred to other facilities.

The only remaining state-run mental hospitals in Alabama are the new Bryce Hospital, the Taylor Hardin Secure Medical Facility and the Mary Starke Harper Geriatric Psychiatry Center, all in Tuscaloosa. The new \$81 million,

260,000 square-foot Bryce Hospital, **which opened its doors this past summer**, replaced the former hospital, which was established in 1861.

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