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EDITOR'S PICK

## UPDATED: Mental health group under new leadership

Adam Smith Sep 9, 2016



Courtesy photo

Lisa Coleman

What could be considered one of the most crucial nonprofit health care agencies in the Tennessee Valley is now under new leadership.

Lisa S. Coleman on Wednesday was named the new executive director of the Mental Health Center of North Central Alabama. The Decatur-based organization serves clients in Limestone, Lawrence and Morgan counties.

Coleman, who has worked for the MHCNCA for 22 years, previously served as associate director and clinical director. She succeeds Marie Hood, who retired Sept. 1.

“Ms. Coleman has considerable experience in the delivery of mental health services, staff oversight and management and organizational leadership,” said a press release about her promotion.

On Thursday, Coleman said she is already working with team leaders and program directors about what tasks should be prioritized moving forward. She wants the center's staff of 170 employees to be involved in the strategic planning process.

“We provide services that no other behavioral health services provide,” she said, adding the center has three full-time psychiatrists. “We have teams that go into homes and programs where clients come in (to receive treatment). We deal with serious cases.”

In regard to future plans, Coleman said the MHCNCA is looking forward to the opening of a triplex housing development, which is nearing completion on Elm Street in Athens. The nine eligible residents who will soon call the development home have been living in old FEMA trailers on the property.

The project began because the MHCNCA sought to build sustainable housing for adults with debilitating mental illnesses such as schizophrenia and manic-depressive disorder.

“The triplex is a big deal to us and our clients are looking forward to it,” Coleman said.

### **Mental health challenges**

When asked about the role of a mental health professional today, Coleman said the job is more challenging than ever. Some of those challenges include the availability of financial resources like Medicaid to other issues like managed care and jail overcrowding.

The deadliest shooting in U.S. history occurred in June at a predominately gay nightclub in Florida.

Those who knew the shooter, 29-year-old Omar Mateen, said he suffered from mental illness. A report in the Orlando Sentinel found Florida ranked 49th in the country in terms of mental health funding.

Here in Alabama, things aren't much better. Advocacy group Mental Health America ranked Alabama 31st out of all states in terms of prevalence of mental illness and access to care. A Kaiser Family Foundation survey from 2013 found Alabama had a per capital mental health services expenditure of \$72.64. By comparison, Connecticut spent \$216.76, while Maine spent \$345.36.

“There is an increased awareness,” Coleman said in response to a question about mental health funding. “The problem has always existed, but with increased awareness, it's at least getting on the radar.”

For more information, visit <http://www.mhcnca.org>.

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Adam Smith