

Doctor says crisis intervention training could help state's mental health care problem

BY MELANIE YUILL
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Mental Health summit will aim to help fix Alabama's problems with mental health care

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Birmingham, Ala. — It's no secret, many inmates in Alabama prisons suffer from mental illness. Next year groups are coming together for a mental health summit to make positive changes to mental health care.

Dr. Jacqueline Feldman with UAB's Department of Psychiatry said jails and hospitals are not the best places for anyone with mental illness because they aren't therapeutic environments.

In February, Dr. Feldman told ABC33/40 a new task force was created between the Department of Mental Health and the Department of Corrections to come up with solutions for the state's problems with mental health care. "They have continued to meet but really I don't know that significant process has occurred," said Dr. Feldman on Thursday.

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She said the lack of progress is not because of a lack of trying, rather budgetary constraints. Now Dr. Feldman said there's an initiative to think of innovative solutions that use existing funds. The mental health summit in January will start the process of creating a bill that could save the department of corrections money. "A bill that NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) wants to submit that has to do with mandating that every law enforcement officer be trained in CIT- crisis intervention training," said Dr. Feldman.

Feldman said training officers to de-escalate situations involving people with mental illness and getting them help instead of putting them in jail can save the department of corrections money. "You can download and decrease the amount of stress on a criminal justice system and maybe shift some of those monies that would be spent there and into the mental health system."

She said this will require several departments and people to communicate and work together but she's optimistic it can be done.

Dr. Feldman said crisis intervention training has already worked in Miami-Dade County Florida.

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