Bryce Hospital turns 150 this week

Submitted by Melynda Sides, Fox 6 Community Web Producer
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Topics: Health, News

Aerial view of Bryce Hospital from 1945. Source: ADMH

From the Alabama Department of Mental Health:

MONTGOMERY – Governor Robert Bentley recently proclaimed October 2, 2011, as Bryce Hospital Day in Alabama. Because of the hospital’s significant contributions to the treatment of mental illness in the state, it is appropriate the 150th anniversary of Bryce Hospital is recognized during National Mental Illness Awareness Week, observed October 2-8.

Bryce Hospital in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, has been in continuous operation since 1861. In its early years, it exemplified the clinical philosophy of the moral treatment movement, and influenced the design and construction of psychiatric hospitals across the nation. Eventually the original white-domed central pavilion and its six wings were extended to accommodate a patient population that grew from the initial 250 to more than 5,000. The overcrowded conditions were the antithesis of Dr. Peter Bryce’s philosophy. At its peak population, the hospital became the focal point in America for the civil rights movement for people with mental illnesses through the federal lawsuit Wyatt v. Stickney in 1970. By the time the lawsuit ended in 2003, it had transformed mental health treatment in the U.S. The hospital is on the National Register for Historic Places as a site with national significance.

With a rich history that strongly influenced the architecture of psychiatric hospitals, the clinical evolution of mental health treatment in the United States and the beginnings of the civil rights movement for people with mental illnesses, Bryce is unique. Enduring the Civil War and the burning of the University of Alabama, Bryce is a symbol of resiliency and reform. As a contemporary of the state Capitol, the 150-year-old structure is an irreplaceable Alabama treasure for future generations.
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