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Former Carraway hospital considered as replacement for Bryce Option would entail selling operation to UA

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TUSCALOOSA - The Alabama Department of Mental Health is considering moving the state's psychiatric hospital to the former Carraway Medical Center campus in Birmingham's Norwood neighborhood.

Relocating the facility to Carraway from Bryce Hospital in Tuscaloosa, adjacent to the University of Alabama, is one of several options the department's board of trustees is considering, officials said Thursday.

Other options include building a 268-bed hospital at an undetermined site or contracting with a private operator to build and run a psychiatric hospital.

Gov. Bob Riley said Thursday he became convinced Bryce needed to be replaced several years ago after touring the grounds. He asked the board to meet at Bryce so trustees could see firsthand how some buildings literally were caving in from age and neglect.

"I think the state of Alabama can do better than we're doing here," Riley told the trustees.

The board considered, but did not vote on, a proposal from the University of Alabama to buy the almost 200-acre Bryce campus. UA's \$60 million offer includes \$50 million in cash and \$10 million in money pledged for historical preservation and environmental cleanup.

The board instead decided to do more analysis and get concrete numbers on the options for replacing Bryce.

Reforms mandated:

Bryce Hospital opened in 1861, survived the Civil War while the nearby university was burned and became notorious in the 1970s for inhumane conditions, resulting in a federal court order for sweeping reforms. The campus today is home to 340 mental health patients.

If Bryce is replaced, board members anticipate moving 100 of the hospital's patients into non-institutional, community settings because their conditions do not demand hospitalization.

The Carraway option surfaced several weeks ago, when the owners of the hospital just north of downtown Birmingham contacted Riley and John Houston, commissioner of the Department of Mental Health....

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