

# Plan will keep Dorothea Dix open three more years

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The state mental health facility in Raleigh formerly known as Dorothea Dix Hospital will continue to provide limited care for at least the next three years to patients of Central Regional Hospital, the state's new psychiatric hospital.

Lanier Cansler, secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, said Wednesday that the facility, now a subsidiary campus of Central Regional, will continue to serve as a 60-bed psychiatric care overflow unit as well as continue housing children and adolescents who need long-term care.



Long-term care ranges an average of 6 to 9 months while short-term care usually lasts 5 to 10 days.

Dix was supposed to close last year and patients were to move to Central Regional, but a judge issued a temporary restraining order in September that delayed the move indefinitely. Patient advocacy groups asked for the order because of long-expressed safety concerns about the new facility in Butner.

The decision to keep Dix open is part of a new plan that, Cansler said, would fully utilize all of Central Regional's facilities.

Children and adolescents receiving short-term care at both Dix and John Umstead Hospital, another subsidiary campus of Central Regional, will move to a 72-bed children's unit at Central Regional, under the plan.

Part of that unit, which includes an indoor gym, exercise room and classrooms, has been used for office space since the facility opened in July. Those offices would move to the Umstead space vacated by young patients.

The initial goal for Central Regional when it was designed in 2003 was to consolidate patients from Dorothea Dix and Umstead, but by the time the facility opened last summer, there were more patients than beds available.

"Over time, I would anticipate that part of what we're keeping on the Dix campus, at least, will phase out," Cansler said Wednesday. "But we need to make sure there are beds available and meet the needs of the population. Right now, the best way is to keep part of the operation on the Dix campus."

Patient advocacy group Disability Rights North Carolina supports Cansler's plan, executive director, Vicki Smith, said Wednesday.

"He's willing to really look at and re-evaluate plans that have been in place and make the appropriate

adjustments to respond to the need now," Smith said. "He's not let in to a failed plan."

More recently, the group began expressing concerns about mold, mildew, asbestos and prison-like living conditions where children were housed in a renovated area at Umstead.

Cansler said his plan has received approval from Gov. Bev Perdue and lawmakers. But there are still some hurdles that could keep the plan from happening, including that restraining order. DHHS will have to go before the court to ask that it be lifted.

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