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WHEATLAND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES TO MERGE WITH STATE

Officials with the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, and Wheatland Mental Health Center, Inc., in Enid, are finalizing plans that will strengthen mental health services in Garfield, Logan, Kingfisher and Grant counties.

In action Friday, May 23, Wheatland's board of directors approved plans to initiate a merger and the transfer of assets to the state.

Effective July 1, Wheatland's offices in Enid, Kingfisher and Guthrie will operate under the auspices of the Northwest Center for Behavioral Health (formerly Western State Psychiatric Center). NCBH provides inpatient, outpatient and residential mental health services to all of northwest Oklahoma. In addition to the main facility in Woodward, NCBH operates satellite mental health outpatient facilities in Alva and Guymon.

"The catalyst for this public/private partnership was two-fold," said Rand Baker, ODMHSAS deputy commissioner for mental health services. "Historically, mental health funding levels for this area have been low compared with other regions of the state. With state budget shortfalls looming for an unforeseeable time period, prospects for any significant change in funding for Wheatland weren't good. In discussions with Wheatland, we believed

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a collaborative venture could increase services to Enid and surrounding communities much more quickly than anything we'd be able to do otherwise.

“Secondly, with NCBH already the primary provider of inpatient mental health services for this area, this move will strengthen the continuum of care for our clients,” he added.

Wheatland Mental Health Center, Inc., has been an ODMHSAS contract facility for years, serving as the area's primary provider of outpatient mental health services to persons with a serious mental illness. Currently, Wheatland facilities provide mental health outpatient services to nearly 750 adults, and 200 children and youth. A joint NCBH/Wheatland letter is being sent to all current clients to advise them of the administrative change under way, and also to reassure them there will be no interruption in services.

The transfer will impact about 20 employees, said NCBH Executive Director Steve Norwood, who will oversee the state-operated satellite offices.

“Our hope is that most, if not all, of the current employees will transfer to the state system,” he said. “We will have personnel teams visit each of the three satellite offices, meet with employees, and then issue offers of employment as soon thereafter as possible.”

“This merger will be a positive development for the northwest region, allowing us to leverage additional resources much more effectively,” Baker added. “At the beginning, all that will change, for clients and staff, will be the name on the building. Very soon, though, clients and staff alike will work together to enhance the services that will be available.

“NCBH already has a continuum of services in place and already serves as the inpatient provider for this region, so this will be a good match,” Baker said. “We also

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anticipate some cost savings as a result of this merger, meaning additional dollars will be freed up for services. Especially at this time of state budget shortfalls, any extra dollars we can apply directly to services will be beneficial to those who need our help.”

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