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CMH cuts running deep

Agency to close Uhrichsville clinic, eliminate services at Carrollton**By Lee Morrison****The Times-Reporter**

Posted Sep 09, 2009 @ 11:34 PM

Cuts totaling about \$388,000 at Community Mental Health mean the agency is closing its Uhrichsville clinic and eliminating psychiatrist services at Carrollton.

Director Dr. Joseph Gavin said the Uhrichsville clinic will close Oct. 30. There has been a clinic there since the mid-1970s.

"This will impact 455 clients who will have to travel to our New Philadelphia clinic for all their services," Gavin said. "Several programs, especially those for kids, will probably be discontinued due to parents being unable to transport them."

He said the seven staff members there, mostly full-time employees, will relocate to the New Philadelphia clinic at 567 Wabash Ave. NW. Gavin explained that the New Philadelphia building was purchased through grant funds, but the agency has to pay rent at Uhrichsville. The savings on rent and utilities helped lead to the decision.

"With the downward spiral in the economy, there's a need for more services, and to have to make these cuts just compounds the problems," he said. "These are the most severe cuts I've ever seen to community-based services to help people in my 30 years as director of this agency. This isn't just one year that this is going to happen. I don't see the revenue improving, especially if the overall employment situation doesn't improve."

Effective Sept. 30, adult and children's psychiatric services will end at the Carrollton office. Gavin said there are 186 active clients there receiving medication management services. About 100 will have to travel to Dover for continued care with a psychiatrist, he said. The remainder will see a general medical doctor at the Carrollton clinic for their medication follow-up "if they choose to do so," Gavin said.

Based on the current referral rate of eight to 10 people per month, Gavin said roughly 100 new clients from Carroll County over the next 10 months face the drive to Dover for their initial psychiatric assessment.

Psychological staff time will be cut in half, and the agency will shift its focus to Medicaid clients because those visits are reimbursed at 100 percent, he said.

"Because of these cuts, we're going to have to look at our sources of payment very carefully," he said.

CMH psychologists will only see clients for diagnostic purposes if they plan to seek services at the agency.

"We're no longer going to be doing psychological testing for Job and Family Services, the courts, attorneys and other agencies who want a professional opinion relative to a case they're handling that doesn't otherwise involve our services," he said. "That's because most of those requests for services aren't reimbursed."

Those agencies can arrange for assessments through Pathway Practice, a CMH subsidiary, and will pay for those services.

Overall, CMH will reduce its available service to the public by 2,400 hours over the next 10 months. All staff are taking a 5-percent pay cut, which equals two hours per week. It means the agency will be open 38 hours per week instead of 40. Several contract staff members will be cut or reduced in case management services, outpatient counseling and partial day treatment services.

"I want to assure the community that no cuts are being made in crisis services, which will remain available 24/7," Gavin said. "However, there may be delays in how quickly the phone gets answered or more waiting time for assessments as people who would've routinely gone to the office now find themselves making use of emergency services, similar to what happens with emergency room use instead of personal doctor visits.

"These service cuts will result in long waiting lists and people not being served at all, such as elimination of on-site psychiatric services to nursing homes or psychological testing done at referral agency clinics."

Gavin said access times will double in most cases. Currently, it usually is 25 to 30 days before a person can see a psychiatrist for the first time. He expects that to become 50 to 60 days for first-time appointments, and 90 days to a half-year for child psychiatry sessions.

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