

Juniper Ridge to shut down Nov. 9

Psychiatric facility may shift to secure residential treatment care next year

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

Juniper Ridge Acute Care Center, an inpatient psychiatric facility in John Day, is shutting down and laying off four nurses in the face of financial losses with plans to shift to a secure residential treatment facility.

Community Counseling Solutions CEO Kimberly Lindsay said the facility would stop admitting patients Oct. 26 and discharge the remaining patients by Nov. 6.

Next year, she said Juniper Ridge would begin taking patients who have been downgraded from acute psychiatric care from the Oregon State Hospital in Junction City.

Lindsay said there has been pressure put on the state hospital to discharge acute psychiatric patients to secure residential facilities.

She said the increase in the number of acute care beds in the state will hinder Juniper Ridge's ability to stay financially solvent.

Lindsay said the patients, deemed stable and no longer a danger to themselves or others, will be at Juniper Ridge for six months.

Lindsay said the funding to update the facility to a secure residential treatment facility would be through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act, which must be spent by the end of the year.

She said construction will begin Nov. 9 to expand the facility from 11 beds to 13. The project is expected to be completed in roughly three months.

Lindsay said there are currently between seven and eight patients at the facility, which, on average, has been running at 80-85% capacity.

She said she wants the public to know, while psychiatric patients are usually not allowed to be out in public, secure residential treatment patients are with a staff escort. Lindsay said one staff member could supervise up to five residential patients under the state's regulations. However, she said, a patient could be required to be with one staff member in public.

The residential patients are stepping down to a lower level of care, intending to enter back into society, she said.

She told the court she did not want to give the wrong impression. At Lakeview Heights, she said, there have been patients who have "decompensated."

"In a secure facility, the doors are still locked," Lindsay said. "We're providing that added layer of structure."

In a psychiatric facility, she said they focus on getting someone stable and getting the patient on medication with stays between 14 to 16 days.



The Eagle/Steven Mitchell
Community Counseling Solutions CEO Kimberly Lindsay discusses the shift in care at Juniper Ridge Acute Care Center Oct. 14 during a session of Grant County Court.

Under the new model, there will be a therapeutic component, including group and individual counseling.

"Some of what we are doing with them in the community is helping them be successful as they're stepping down to a lower level of care, which 99% of them are going to do," Lindsay said.

She said she could help someone get a food handler's license, work with patients, put together a budget or cultivate healthy eating habits.

According to the county's contract with CCS, Lindsay said they could open the facility without consulting with the public or county officials.

"It is CCS' value to be thoughtful of the community's interest," Lindsay said. "Technically, we could open, but that's not who we are or what we are about."

Under the contract, she said, CCS provides the public health department functions, outpatient mental health, addiction services for people without health insurance and developmental disability services for the county.

She said, when CCS built Juniper Ridge in 2011, they wanted community input, and if the people had not desired the facility, they would have moved on.

Lindsay said she does not know what to anticipate from the community. She said, before opening Juniper Ridge, people were mostly behind having the facility in John Day.

However, she said, the differences in the populations, where the secure residential patients can be in the community with escorts, might not sit well with some people.

If Juniper Ridge does not transition to a secure residential facility, Lindsay said, it will close completely.

Lindsay encouraged community members to offer their thoughts at surveymonkey.com/r/XW697HV. Comments can also be emailed to juniperridge@ccsemail.org or mailed to Kimberly Lindsay, P.O. Box 469, Heppner, OR 97836.

Hospital board mulling severing ties with management company

Company provides services and counsel

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

The Blue Mountain Hospital District board of directors are considering severing ties with its management company amid criticism from patients for long wait times to see their providers, lost referrals and generally poor customer service.

The tipping point came when the hospital's management placed longtime provider Shawna Clark on administrative leave for improperly adding something to her medical records.

Mary Ellen Brooks, a former board member when the hospital district signed with management firm Brim and Associates 30 years ago, said the hospital "got a lot of good out of Brim."

Brim merged with Province Healthcare in 1995 and moved its headquarters to Tennessee. Since then, the company has gone through three other mergers and a rebranding to HealthTechS3 in 2015.

"(Brim) provided us with the same things that HealthTech is providing you with: supplies and cost savings," she said. "But in those days, Brim was a smaller organization from Portland. They did more for us, and they were more hands-on."

Brooks said she did not come to the work session to blame anyone. However, she said, health care has grown, and times have changed.

Brooks said, with the right leadership, the district could run the hospital independently.

"Their management system does not work for Grant County people," she said. "We have a population of fewer than 8,000 people in this whole county, and we live here because we like the way it is."

Brooks said the county



The Eagle/Steven Mitchell
Mt. Vernon resident and former Blue Mountain Hospital District board member Mary Ellen Brooks during the board's work session.

wants to hold onto its "hometown roots."

"Modern is fine," she said. "But it's gotten out of control."

Brooks said, before Clark, the problems had been mounting for quite a while.

Derek Daly, hospital CEO and an employee of HealthTechS3, said it is normal for a hospital district to evaluate a contract, especially after 30 years.

"We're not the only small town. We're not the only small hospital and a small county that goes through this process," Daly said. "This is very normal."

According to the district's annual expense trend, from July 2019 to June 2020 the district paid HealthTechS3 \$961,717.

Daly said the hospital gets services that range from financial audits to access to a group purchasing organization where the hospital can leverage collective buying power to keep costs down for supplies and materials.

Board chairperson Amy Kreger said the purpose of the work session was to gather facts and to listen to the people whom they represent.

Board member Karla Averett said, whichever way the board decides to go, they need to be careful and not make a "rash" decision to "cripple" the system.

The board spent most of

the meeting inventorying the hospital's services from the management company and considering whether or not they could get them a la carte and have more control in the operations of the hospital.

Board member Dotty Parsons said, when she read through the contract, it looked as if the management company had more control than the board.

"I don't even know why we have a board of directors," Parsons said.

She said, when they have gone to Daly for "suggestions or directions," the management company has been the one "calling the shots."

Averett said Daly is "highly capable" of making decisions on his own without HealthTech.

Daly said he ultimately has the ability to make decisions.

"They provide thoughts, they provide guidance and they provide counsel," he said. However, Daly said his "relationship and his duty" is at the hospital.

Daly said the hospitals that genuinely are independent are still in many circumstances contracting for other services. He said one example is Harney County Hospital, which is very similar to John Day and closely connected to St. Charles Health System because of its electronic medical records program.

He said a lot of information technology support comes from St. Charles.

Averett suggested that a "plan of action" would be to meet with similar hospital districts and other health care management services and then come back for another session.

Kreger said she knows the "long-seated" chair of the Harney County Hospital Board and that they could set up a meeting.

"Who knows," Averett said. "Maybe this is the first step at saving a couple of hundred thousand dollars a year."



VOTE



SAM STINNETT

for

GRANT COUNTY TREASURER

- ★
QUALIFIED
- ★
HONEST
- ★
TRANSPARENT

