



Media Release

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For Immediate Release

DHS to make changes at State Hospital

June 17 -- Department of Human Services Director John Selig on Friday called for wide-ranging changes and improvements at the Arkansas State Hospital and within the agency's Division of Behavioral Health. Selig's decision to change the hospital and division leadership came after federal surveyors found this week that the hospital still had not attained compliance for participation in Medicare.

This morning, Selig accepted the resignations of Hospital Administrator Charles Smith and Division of Behavioral Health Director David Laffoon. Selig, Smith and Laffoon agreed the hospital needed a change in leadership.

In a verbal exit conference after the visit, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) surveyors indicated the hospital had not attained compliance with all conditions for participation in the Medicare program. Although surveyors did not again voice concerns previously expressed about the unit for children with both developmental disabilities and mental illness, they did note problems with treatment plans and activity levels of patients throughout the hospital. In addition, the hospital was cited for an immediate jeopardy finding related to patients' rights. Written findings are expected in the next few weeks.

In the meantime, Department officials will work with CMS to outline the necessary steps the hospital must take to ensure it receives federal funding while staff works to improve patient care. Those steps will require the state to allow federal monitors to visit the hospital.

"We are committed to providing patients effective treatment and to moving the hospital forward," Selig said Friday, adding that he appreciates CMS' willingness to work with the state as it tries to resolve any issues at the hospital.

The top-to-bottom review will include the Division of Behavioral Health, which is responsible for overseeing the hospital as well as mental health services throughout Arkansas. DHS Deputy Director Janie Huddleston, who successfully oversaw a similar review of the Division of Children and Family Services, will lead the review. Huddleston also will head the Behavioral Health Division until a permanent replacement for Laffoon is chosen. Mr. Smith has agreed to remain in his position for 30 days to help with the transition.

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“We will analyze all hospital processes and systems,” Huddleston said Friday.

The Department is developing a plan that will include the use of outside experts to address concerns voiced by CMS. The hospital already has increased staffing levels on some units and has been working to improve treatment and activity plans for patients.