



**Pennsylvania
Psychiatric Society**

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**PSYCHIATRIC SOCIETY CITES NEED FOR PLANNING, FUNDING IN STATE
HOSPITAL CLOSING**

The Pennsylvania Psychiatric Society urges state and county officials to approach the closing of Harrisburg State Hospital cautiously, first putting in place the new services that will be necessary for safe transition and successful treatment and recovery. Existing services that are now in short supply will also need to be increased.

According to the Society's President, M. Ruiza Yee, MD, the psychiatric society has long supported a more integrated approach to mental health care and the delivery of care in community and non-hospital settings when possible. "We have not yet seen the state's plan for accomplishing its goals and are very concerned about its timetable, but we look forward to the opportunity to provide input into the process. The primary focus should be on developing and funding the kinds of treatments and supports that individual patients require, not on the location of the service."

The area served by the Harrisburg State Hospital has a serious shortage of beds for patients who have been released from community hospitals after initial stabilization but still need a safe and secure treatment setting with intensive services. Publicly-funded patients who do not need this level of care and live on their own often face long waiting periods – weeks and even months – to receive outpatient psychiatric services. These and other types of services will need to be developed in order to fill the gap left by the hospital's closure.

Care must also be taken to ensure that patients who have been stabilized in a hospital on a particular medication will be able to receive that medication, without interruption, when they are released to the community. Currently, this does not always occur, because of restrictive formularies and failures in Medical Assistance approval processes.

Residential treatment settings in the community are smaller, closer to friends and family, and less impersonal than in large hospitals. Nevertheless, some patients still need long-term, intensive care in a safe and secure setting not easily available through community services. "These presumably are the people that the Department intends to transfer to Danville and Wernersville State Hospitals. Ironically, this will take them even further from their communities, creating hardship for both patients and their families."

Experience in the other parts of the state has been that closures without attention to alternative care, mindful to the need for housing and intensive services, has been problematic. When done thoughtfully, with a strong commitment for funding and collaboration between the state, county, consumers, providers, and families, it can be successful.

The Pennsylvania Psychiatric Society represents nearly 1800 physicians practicing the medical specialty of psychiatry.

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