



[Home](#) < [Back](#)

Hotline ready to Respond in mental health crisis

By NET News Service

Published May 10th, 2009

A mental health crisis can be a frightening experience, both for the individual and for his or her family.

"The families are in a really difficult situation if they have a family member who doesn't want to receive treatment," said Marlene Bailey, manager of Respond – the 24-hour crisis response hotline run by Mountain States Health Alliance.

Respond is a toll-free service staffed by licensed counselors, and it exists to help families find out what their options are when a loved one seems out of control.

"People don't always know, and that's why we encourage that they call us," Bailey said. "We will help them through any of the steps."

Sometimes a patient's needs can be met through various community agencies that offer outpatient treatment, but sometimes inpatient treatment is the best option. If the patient is resistant to treatment but is posing a danger to himself or others, the state can step in and file an order of commitment.

That sometimes happens when police are called to help defuse a situation. Johnson City has a group of officers who are specially trained in crisis intervention and can help safely connect mental patients with the help they need. Police don't always have to be involved, however. An order of commitment can be filed in the hospital emergency room or at Woodridge Hospital.

The process of having someone committed to a mental hospital is not simple, and that's a good thing, according to Kim Moore, director of operations for MSHA's behavioral health programs.

"The state has put steps in place to protect the patient's rights," Moore said. "That's why it's a two-step process. Not just one person can sign a commitment and say, 'You're committed.'"

There are two signatures required to admit someone to a mental hospital against his or her will. The first person to sign commitment papers is known as a mandatory pre-screener.

"Those are master's-level people who are trained by the state and acting for the state," said Bailey.

The second signature comes from a psychiatrist at the receiving facility after a thorough evaluation.

Woodridge accepts both committed patients and voluntary admissions. The average length of stay there is about six days for adults and seven to eight days for adolescents. The goal is to get the patient stabilized and started on a regular treatment regimen that can continue on an outpatient basis after he or she is released.

Patients who need to be hospitalized longer are often transferred to Lakeshore Hospital in Knoxville for long-term care. Elderly patients may be treated locally at nursing homes with locked wards designed to care for patients with dementia.

Having a family member committed can be an agonizing experience, but Bailey said it's important to maintain communication throughout the process.

"Families do go through a very, very difficult time during this, particularly parents of adolescents," she said. "We really try to involve family members when someone is in the hospital, because part of a person becoming healthier mentally is connecting with your family and with those people who love you – letting them help you through the process.

"We encourage family members to get involved with local organizations like NAMI (the National Alliance on Mental Illness) so that they can share with other families what they're going through."

To reach the Respond hotline and talk to a counselor any time of the day or night, call (800) 346-8899 or 431-7004. If anyone is in imminent danger, however, do not hesitate to call 911. Your local dispatch service can send a crisis intervention specialist to help protect both you and your family.