

News

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September 19, 1989

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****UT Southwestern psychiatrist offers
unique solution to bed shortage

A unique model plan to provide psychiatric beds in private hospitals to indigent patients has been designed by a UT Southwestern psychiatrist.

Dr. Kenneth Altshuler, chairman of the Department of Psychiatry at The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas, conceived the idea for this innovative effort in which a group of 11 private psychiatric hospitals and facilities will offer unoccupied beds on a rotating basis for indigent patients who need care in a crisis situation.

According to the plan developed by the Private Hospital Coalition, the private beds will be limited to current Dallas County Mental Health Mental Retardation (MHMR) patients in need of short-term hospitalization for psychiatric illnesses. The Parkland Memorial Hospital psychiatric emergency room will provide access to the beds. Parkland is a major teaching hospital for UT Southwestern.

"This cooperative venture, which brings together the public and private sectors, is the first of its kind in the country," said Altshuler. "We believe it can serve as a model for other communities across the country."

The coalition was organized under the auspices of the Mental Health Association of Dallas County. Chairman of the coalition is Dr.

(More)

Richard Roskos, director of Green Oaks Hospital.

The number of psychiatric beds for the indigent is not sufficient to take care of all the patients who are in need of hospitalization in Dallas County, mental health officials said.

"There are just not enough public beds available to fill the needs," said Michael Faenza, executive director of the Mental Health Agency (MHA). "Patients are often sent back into the community immediately after being stabilized at the ER (emergency room). Often they need more intensive treatment and time away from home to ensure that they're back on track."

Altshuler said that the voluntary plan may prevent a worsened condition in patients who require attention but are not violent or out of control.

The cooperating private hospitals will assume the cost for physicians who see the MHMR patients, but because the facilities will be called on a rotating basis, the costs will not be burdensome, said Carol Madison. Madison is community education director at the MHA.

Coalition members include Baylor University Medical Center/Collins Hospital, Brookhaven Psychiatric Pavilion, Charter Hospital of Dallas, Doctors Hospitals, Green Oaks Hospital, The Haven, Methodist Medical Center, Presbyterian Medical Center, St. Paul Medical Center, Timberlawn Psychiatric Hospital and Zale-Lipshy University Hospital. University Hospital is scheduled to open in November.

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Note: The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas comprises Southwestern Medical School, Southwestern Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences and Southwestern Allied Health Sciences School.