

Responses to Questions Submitted by The Charlotte Observer

The following information is provided in response to the questions submitted by The Charlotte Observer. As context it should be noted that the provision of mental health services in North Carolina is primarily the responsibility of the State. Most North Carolina counties have historically been under-funded by the State to meet the needs of their residents, and Mecklenburg County receives one of the lowest per capita funding allocations from the State. As a result, Mecklenburg County government has responded to the local needs by providing significant local funding. The local funding has allowed the development of a broad continuum of services for the residents of Mecklenburg County.

As a result of mental health reform in North Carolina, the delivery of mental health services has undergone considerable change since 2001. Most of the services that were traditionally provided by Mecklenburg County Area Mental Health have been outsourced to local providers as mandated by the N.C. General Assembly. The entity historically known as Area Mental Health in this community is now known as a Local Management Entity (LME). The Mecklenburg LME is responsible for a wide variety of functions. The Mecklenburg LME provides 24/7 screening, triage and referral through our MeckLINK line (704) 336-6404; provides utilization management for State and county funded services and monitors providers who receive public mental health, substance abuse and developmental disability funding. The LME contracts with providers for State and county funded services and endorses providers prior to their receiving a Medicaid direct billing number.

Mecklenburg County Area Mental Health program has had a very successful long term contractual relationship beginning in 1986 with Carolina Healthcare System through what is now known as the CMC-Randolph facility. Mecklenburg County owns the building where CMC-Randolph is housed and CMC-R provides the management of a broad continuum of mental health services. The core service provided is the operation of a 66-bed inpatient psychiatric hospital. This allows for the hospitalization of individuals locally rather than having them go out of county or to the regional State hospital. As a result Mecklenburg has one of the lowest admission rates to State facilities in North Carolina. This provides better outcomes and better care for residents of the County. The dedicated psychiatric emergency department is the only one of its type in the entire region and State.

Questions and Responses:

-What is driving the increased demand for services?

No one knows for certain because no detailed studies of this issue have been performed. It can be speculated that the following may be contributing to the increase in demand:

- Continued growth in the county population
- Overall economic conditions
- Greater awareness of the availability of services due to increases in social marketing

-For how long have you been seeing this increase in demand?

- Demand has been going up steadily since 2006 as evidenced by the following numbers:

| Year | Consumers Served |
|------|------------------|
| 2006 | 34,269 |
| 2007 | 38,319 |
| 2008 | 41,109 |
| 2009 | 52,465 |

-It looks like emergency room visits to CMC-Randolph have been rising in recent years. What accounts for that?

It is difficult to determine specific reasons for the increase in emergency room visits, however it is clear that there has indeed been an increase in demand. It is believed that the overall population growth has contributed to this increased demand.

-Calls to the CMC-Randolph call center were at a record level in March – and about 50 percent higher than the same month in 2008. What do you think accounts for that increase?

Questions with respect to the Call Center should be directed to CMC-Randolph.

-What accounts for the rise in the “23-hour observation days of care” measure over the past year?

- Difficulty in getting patients who need observation admitted to Broughton State Hospital (State facility)

-How many patients have been admitted to CMC Randolph during each of the past few years?

- See statistics provided in the Annual Report

-What have been the trends regarding available mental health services in Mecklenburg? What have been the most pronounced changes in recent years?

- Divestiture of services by the county to community providers
- Increase in the number of community providers
- Changes/reductions to funding by the State of community support services
- Implementation by the State of Critical Access Behavioral Health Agencies (CABHA) requirements
- Changes and reductions in Medicaid funding

-What effect have recent funding cutbacks had? What effect do you think they may have in the future?

The reductions have already caused increases in waiting lists for services, and it is anticipated that the waiting lists will grow in the future. Also, various services have been reduced or eliminated.

-What at this point are the most pressing needs for Mecklenburg’s mental health system? What changes do you think will be needed in the next five to 10 years?

- Need for additional inpatient capacity
- Stable supportive housing
- Services for jail diversion

-Starting in 2001, the state’s effort to reform mental health led to a decline in the number of beds at the state’s psychiatric hospitals. What effect has that had on Mecklenburg’s mental health system?

As a result in the decline in the number of beds, CMC-Randolph added observation beds to increase its capacity. Additionally, Area Mental Health developed hospital diversion programs and a crisis stabilization unit in partnership with a private provider known as Mecklenburg Open Door.

-When CMC-Randolph is full, what other options are there for mental health patients who need inpatient help?

- Other inpatient community hospital beds such as Presbyterian Hospital
- Broughton State Hospital

-Specifically, how does the process of referring a patient to another hospital or psychiatric facility work? Does the county have to pay the other hospital? If so, what’s the cost?

- The process of referral to another facility should be directed to CMC-Randolph. Mecklenburg County would not pay the other hospital, because Mecklenburg County does not pay any hospital for individual patient care.

-What have been recent trends when it comes to finding such outside help? Is it harder or easier than it used to be?

While, there has been a reduction statewide in State hospital beds this has not impacted the acute unit at Broughton. However, demand has increased and it is more difficult to get individuals admitted to Broughton.

-In 2007, Grayce Crockett told a state legislative committee that 80 to 90 additional psychiatric beds would be needed in Mecklenburg over the next five years. What led you to that conclusion? If you can share any of the background reports or research that led you to that conclusion, can you share those with us? What do you think the needs are now – and how will you attempt to meet that demand?

- CMC-Randolph had completed a study that indicated a need for more inpatient beds – that was the basis of the conclusion. Actually what was recommended was an additional 67 beds bringing the total at CMC-R to 133 beds.
- CMC is currently doing an evaluation of what the current need/demand is

-How does the area mental health agency ensure quality control at Mecklenburg’s psychiatric hospital?

Quality control is ensured by performance measurements (see Mecklenburg County Balanced Scorecard report). It is also ensured by requiring that CMC-Randolph maintain accreditation by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Health Care Organizations (JCAHO), the highest industry standards, and that it maintain licensure by the State of North Carolina.

-What are the biggest challenges currently faced by Mecklenburg’s mental health system? What are the biggest challenges faced by CMC-Randolph?

The biggest challenge faced by Mecklenburg’s mental health system is an increase in the demand for services without a concomitant increase in available funding.

For challenges with respect to CMC-Randolph, contact CMC-Randolph