



North Alabama Mental Health Coalition May 14, 2024

Attendees (in person):

Daniel Adamek (Little Orange Fish)	Chief David Bailey (Madison Fire)	Kim Bigelow (Warrior Wellness Program)
Annie Brasseale (VOP)	Richard Browning (CID)	Melissa de la Cerda (Wellstone)
Emily Colbert (Wellstone)	Woodie Deleuil (NAMI)	Tracy Delgado (NACH)
La'trisha Fletcher (DHR)	Chief Johnny Gandy (Madison Police)	Amy Gillott (Decatur West)
Kelli Glass (Wellstone)	Kelly Goff (ADMH)	Tammy Goodwin (ALNG)
Traci Harris (Elm Foundation)	Jessica Hays (Huntsville Hospital)	Josaylon Henry (Wellstone)
Chaniece Hicks (First Stop)	Sammie Laster (GRAMI)	Michael Mathis
Cheryl McClendon (Wellstone/WES)	Cathy Miller (United Way)	Tealacy Mitchell (Thrive Alabama)
Connie Oakley (GRAMI)	Letricia Ogutu (Wellstone)	Lorna Roberts (Wellstone)
Jennifer Robinson (Wellstone)	Taralyn Rowell (Wellstone)	Cheryl Russell (Drug Free Partnership)
Julie Schenck-Brown (Huntsville Police)	Chief Dustin Spires (Madison Fire)	Paula Steele (Wellstone/WES)
Kelly Vance (CRS)	Don Webster (HEMSI)	Mack Yates (SVDP/VOP)
Judge Patricia Demos (Mad County Court)	Dr. Jananki Nimmagadda (UAB)	Dr. AnupamaYelda (UAB)

Welcome and Introductions

Introductions are important because you need to find out who to help you

UAB Psychiatric Residency Update – Dr. Jananki Nimmagadda

Dr. Yedla introduced Dr. Nimmagadda who is a child psychiatrist and been in the Huntsville area for five years. UAB has been approved as a primary site for psychiatric residency. It takes almost one decade of training to become a doctor of psychiatry.

It has taken several years for this program to come into existence, especially through the hard work of Dr. Martin. This program is a result of cooperation with UAB Huntsville campus, Huntsville Hospital, and the VA and will start in July 2025.

Alabama ranks low in residency programs (only 3). Starting next year there will be 4 residency programs and the year after that 2 more will be added (Cahaba in Birmingham and Tuscaloosa). East Alabama will be after that. There will be 4 to 5 residency programs in Alabama in the next few years.

They asked and got approval for six candidates. We now have to make sure we have enough funding to move forward. Class size is dependent on funding. In July 2025 will start the residency program and four years after that, the hope is that some of the graduates of the program will want to stay and practice in the Huntsville area.

Someone asked what are the funding sources and how can we help acquire funding. Dr. Nimmagadda was unsure about the specifics and suggested contacting Dr. Martin (who has been working really hard). There is some seed funding, but more is needed. Typically funding comes from Medicare, the State, and local hospitals. Usually, funding does not come from a single entity. It will start next year with 6 residents; they hope to add 6 the following year and continue growing until they have a total of 24.

Someone asked for an estimate of the costs of a residency and she did not know the amount needed, but will ask Dr. Martin.

These residencies are in partnership with Huntsville Hospital. Dr. Yelda and Dr. Nimmagadda hope that they will be involved in the teaching aspects of the program.

Someone suggested that they include a stipulation to keep the funding in the area.

Don suggested getting the Dean of UAB to come and discuss funding.

Mack said that getting the people here is the first step.

A question was raised about what is being done to recruit people. Dr. Nimmagadda said that they must get the funding before they can start the hiring process. September 1st is the typical start time to open the application process.

There is a huge interest in the training online already. UAB has more students interested in psychiatry than before. Nationwide there is an increased interest in psychiatry.

Dr. Finn brought up the point that residents are young doctors starting out and they are looking for a good supportive community. Once they get started in a community, they tend to stick around. This will be a huge step forward for the whole community.

Montgomery does not see North Alabama as being underserved. Residents look at which job is going to help them pay off their loans. This is not unique to psychiatry, but applies across the board.

Cathy Miller brought up the fact that there is a need for child psychiatrists in our area and asked if there will be residences in both adult and child psychiatry. They are starting with the adult program with the hope to add the child one later.

Mack mentioned that this seems like the only real path forward to get more psychiatrists in the area.

The job of the coalition is to identify what needs to be done, but the solution requires everyone to work together.

Dr. Yelda mentioned what a huge effort was put forth to get the program approved and said Dr. Martin was the catalyst. She also said that the whole community has been very supportive.

Madison Fire and Police Mental Health Update – Chief Bailey, Chief Spires and Chief Gandy

Chief Bailey talked about the City of Madison. The city has a population of more than 60,000 people with an area of about 30 square miles. They have great partnerships with HEMSI and others and always look forward to collaboration with other organizations. Chief Spires is part of the Special Staffing Work Group that deals with people that are frequent users of the emergency services.

Chief Spires does the data management for the fire department. He reviewed the calls for service for mental health and found some holes. In Madison about 5% of the calls for service are mental health related. There is a possible trend down (4.2 – 5% over 3-year period). They also looked at poisoning numbers because that can sometimes be related to a mental health issue. In 2023, there were 79 overdoses, but NARCAN was given 39 times (about 50% of calls). The data doesn't show whether the poisonings were intentional or not. Their data also doesn't show how many times family members are giving NARCAN. Need the data to better show if NARCAN is actually working in the city.

Looking at the data showed them areas that need improvement. They are committed to making the system better. The police numbers are similar to fire.

Chief Gandy looks at how effective the police are with crisis intervention. It is hard to get true numbers because many of the calls are registered as one situation by the 911 dispatchers and then they turn out to be a different situation when the police arrive at the scene.

Chief Gandy arrived in July 2021 and wanted to get a true number of calls, so he could plan for them. All the other law enforcement groups in the county wanted the same data. The communication center is shared in Madison County, so they bought a program where all the services can share the data. They are still training on the new program, so the true numbers are not available yet.

They are trying to be proactive in Madison, so they are using the CIT program. Currently they have 10 CIT officers which is roughly 10% of the force (101 members of the force). He would like at least 1/3 of uniform officers to have CIT certification. Most of the CIT officers are on day shift. CIT is a volunteer opportunity and many of the trained officers are upwardly mobile officers who might leave for other opportunities.

They have 3 community mental health officers. Stacy just retired but is coming back in a new capacity as a consultant.

Community mental health program is a stop-gap program, but Chief Gandy does not like law enforcement officers to make decisions about mental health commitments. He would rather have mental health professionals be co-responders.

All the public safety dispatchers are receiving CIT as well (thanks to GRAMI). They are trying to get an immediate triage of the situation in order to get the appropriate services to respond to a call.

Since Chief Gandy has been here, there have been no deaths due to an officer dealing with a mental health situation. In 2022, there were 208 mental health calls and they only had to use minor force 3 times. The first

purchase Chief Gandy made was a device called “the wrap”. “The wrap” allows officers to bundle their legs and put them in a sitting position, so they don’t do any harm to themselves or others and they don’t have to use chemical restraint.

In 2023, there were 213 mental health calls, and they only had to use minor force 7 times.

In the future, he wants to try and get more officers CIT certified and wants to implement mobile co-responders. The Madison police have been through a program called “Teaching a Police Brain” which helps officers deal better with juveniles through understanding their way of thinking. Dr. Finn has agreed to help them with this program.

They have done the “Train the Trainers” program so they can do their own training.

Chief Spires spoke about mental health of the law enforcement personnel. Two years ago, they started to provide voluntary medical exams for fire fighters. Among other things, they look at the mental health and wellness of firefighters. Part of this is an online survey to spot several mental health issues such as depression and PTSD. The survey gives them instant feedback providing them with resources online. Medical providers can also see the numbers right away. Mental health issues in first responders are a nationwide problem with 27.9% of firefighters screened positive for depression, 26.7% for anxiety, 17.2% for alcohol use, 6.2 % for PTSD, and 47% for impaired sleep. The Madison numbers are similar and they are looking at what they need to do to help them stay in the force.

The City of Madison has a contract with Behavioral Health Systems to provide counseling and additional resources for the first responders. They have also hired Stacy Thomas (a licensed counselor) to be an onsite mental health therapist. They also utilize a peer support network for counseling.

A question was asked about a coordinated data collection system between first responders in the area. The data that is collected is for internal reports for the service providers. When the 911 call comes in, they have to assign a code to it, but then the situation may change when the responders arrive on the scene.

Two main data sources where 911 calls are recorded. One is CAD/C (computer aided dispatch center) and they also have a records management system that is used by all three agencies. The records management system cannot talk to CAD/C.

Julie Schenck-Brown said the Huntsville Police are trying to deal with that issue. They are trying to fine tune the system so the reporting officer can enter a code to signify mental health related calls. When they get the adjustments made, they will be able to share them with the other first responders in the area.

The 911 dispatchers are tied to what they hear. You can train the dispatchers in CIT, but once that person leaves, there isn’t necessarily someone else taking calls with the training.

911 calls are recorded, but they are not transcribed. A strict mental health call is not a criminal call.

A question was asked about how the agencies are responding to secondary trauma. Chief Gandy acknowledged that dispatchers have a stressful job. Trying to get them help. Madison has hired a crime analyst.

988 and 211 Review – Mack Yates

Mack had passed out cards to explain 211 with Spanish on one side. Cathy Miller has lots of these cards, so contact her if you need some. They are trying to get 988 cards done in Spanish as well. 211 is a resource number but they will refer you to 988 if you need mental health help.

Cathy said they are grateful for the 211 network because they can tap into all languages.

Traditionally you would call 211 but now there is a text number and a FB page.

211 is still the most robust listing of resources in the community. If you are not in their resource list, please contact United Way to get your information in their list.

Open Floor

There will be an Empowering Autism workshop on August 2nd in Huntsville.

Don had numbers that the coalition for the homeless requested. In the first 4 months of 2024 there were 436 (911) calls to the Downtown Rescue Mission, 85 to the Salvation Army, 41 calls to First Stop, and 40 calls to the Derrick homeless camp.

August 16th is GRAMIs fund raising event at the Jackson Center. Tickets are available on Event Brite. The keynote speaker is Eli Gold (the voice of Alabama football).

Judge Demos mentioned that Rex Reynolds got a bill passed that will provide \$30 million in Mental Health Services. Judge Demos said that she sees homelessness in her court all the time and she would love some help to figure out temporary housing for these folks. She also feels like DHR social workers need to be seen as first responders. They need the same services as other first responders.

Someone asked about the constraints on the \$30 million. Judge Demos is trying to find out. She knows that some of the money is going to the Mental Health Department and some of it is going to Mental Health Courts.

Someone brought up that it is listed on the Mental Health Department's website. Don brought up that it came from the opioid settlement.

Mack mentioned that a big gap still exists because the jails are still a de facto mental health center. There is only one nurse that can prescribe meds and she is only at the jail 8 hours per week. There are no long-term treatment centers.

Judge Demos deals with a lot of homeless people getting out of jail. They have trouble making bond and they can't get the meds that were prescribed to them in the jail. The sheriff would love to see those with mental health issues out of the jail. Her dream is to take an old hotel and convert it to housing for mentally ill and include a mental health clinic right there as well.

Someone brought up the issue of marijuana. A survey was done and 43% see marijuana as an issue, especially with teenagers. They are told there is only one place to go for treatment and sometimes transportation is a barrier. Insurance companies will not pay for outpatient treatment for juveniles. There was a request for any other options for treatment. Evidence suggests that marijuana is a gateway drug.

THC levels are going up. We do not have good answers for that.

Cathy asked that you fill out the United Way needs assessment this week. They use this information to apply for grants and to figure out where the greatest needs are. To fill out the survey, you can use either the QR code or go to the website specified below:



Or go to the website:

<https://tinyurl.com/UWMCCCommunityNeedsSurvey>

Mike Matthis with the Youth Foundation mentioned that there is the Mental Health Carnival and 5K race this Saturday at Big Spring Park. The race starts at 8 am and the Mental Health Fair is from 10 am - 1 pm. 28 organizations have signed up. Today is the last day to sign up as an exhibitor.

*Next Meeting
Tuesday June 11, 2024
11:00 am at Wellstone*