

- [back to story page](#)

URL: <http://www.abqjournal.com/opinion/editorials/401783opinion10-25-05.htm>

Tuesday, October 25, 2005

County Detox Center Tackles Cost of Abuse

It's about time people with big drinking problems and little means can get help. About time emergency room beds are used for people with medical emergencies instead of addictions. About time we tried to jam a foot in the revolving door that is alcohol abuse.

This week Bernalillo County will attempt all three.

The county bought a vacant psychiatric hospital in the Southeast Heights for \$2.5 million last year, spent another \$330,000 on improvements and came up with the MATS— Metropolitan Assessment and Treatment Services— center.

Work wrapped up Friday, and programs start moving in this week for MATS' 50 five-day detox beds, 70 28-day treatment beds and 12 mental-health crisis triage beds. The center will also offer counseling and other services.

Despite the seemingly high start-up costs, the county should see a quick return on its investment— and not just financially.

New Mexico has the highest percentage of people reporting dependence on or abuse of illicit drugs or alcohol, according to federal statistics for 2003. And many of those people end up in already crowded ERs, getting little help except the chance to sleep it off at the expense of taxpayers and the inconvenience of patients with acute illnesses or injuries.

County Commissioner Deanna Archuleta-Loeser says local hospitals spend an estimated \$22 million a year treating folks for public drunkenness. University of New Mexico ER physician Sam Slishman says "every night I take care of a lot of people who are intoxicated. The next morning the bed rail goes down, and they're added to the streets" again.

MATS is designed to help stop the cycle of career alcoholics. And treatment doesn't stop with detox. Businessman Ted Waterman donated 48 prefab housing units worth \$400,000 so folks in recovery have a safe and sober place to live while looking for work. And Slishman is opening a community center across the street with Alcoholics Anonymous meetings and other programs for MATS grads.

Factor in that the hair of the dog will be paying for much of the rehab— state liquor taxes will provide about \$1.7 million of MATS' estimated \$2.2 million annual operating budget— and you've got an idea whose time has finally come in Bernalillo County.

All content copyright © ABQJournal.com and Albuquerque Journal and may not be republished without permission. Requests for permission to republish, or to copy and distribute must be obtained at the the Albuquerque Publishing Co. Library, 505-823-3492, or through Icopyright.com.

[Back to story page](#)