

Monday, May 17, 2004

County To Set Up Detox Center

By Chris Vogel

Journal Staff Writer

Bernalillo County has agreed to pay \$2.5 million to purchase a detoxification and treatment center at an abandoned hospital.

"We realize DWI issues are possibly the largest concern to our community," Bernalillo County Commissioner Tim Cummins said. "I don't know if we can begin to estimate the damage done. We hope this helps reduce (repeat offenders) as we try to provide the best treatment possible."

The center will have a short-term detoxification program and a 28-day residential treatment program. Case workers will then help patients reintegrate into society and get housing.

Sam Slishman, an emergency room physician at University of New Mexico Hospital, will help with the new center.

"Every night that I work in the UNM ER I care for quite a few intoxicated or homeless individuals, who simply have nowhere better to go," he said Friday. "And every morning, I typically send them back to the streets without improving their lives much ... (We) believe this project will revolutionize care for the indigent and substance-dependent populations of Albuquerque."

John Dantis, director of Bernalillo County's public safety, said a year ago Cummins and others started developing a 28-day detox transition program.

On Tuesday, the commission approved the purchase of the old Charter Hospital, 5901 Zuni SE, to set it up, he said.

The center was also supported by the neighborhood associations and City Councilor Martin Heinrich, whose district the building is in.

"We all recognized how long we needed this," he said, "and I'm happy to have it in my district. This is a very good day for Albuquerque and the county of Bernalillo."

Cummins said the city has agreed to help finance the operating costs.

Kevin Kinzie, the county's DWI program coordinator, said the center would be the first of its kind in the county.

"Community benefits include pedestrian safety and we get public inebriates off the streets and on a path that gets them off that cycle," he said.

Liz Hamm, county spokeswoman, said no timeline has been set for when the center will start treating patients.



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