

Gubernatorial Debate, WTVD August 20, 2008

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Excerpted discussions about mental health

16:30 → 17:40 minutes

McCrory (in response to Perdue's statement about healthcare):

Listen - this is coming from an administration which has totally destroyed the mental health care system in North Carolina. In which, just today, we read in the front page of the Raleigh newspaper about a patient who is left alone dying in a state mental health care hospital.

We're talking about closing Dorothea Dix Hospital at a time when there is a shortage of beds and in our emergency rooms we have people waiting 20, 30, 40, and even examples of people waiting 70 hours to get a mental health care bed and not have to sit in an emergency room.

So the leadership in health care has not been successful under this administration for the past eight years and it is time to revise ---

Don't implement a new health care strategy which was decentralized out to rural cities and big cities alike in North Carolina without having the resources to implement that strategy and without telling anyone what that strategy is and then having an administration not take accountability for the mistakes which cost hundreds of millions of dollars which could have been put into helping our children throughout North Carolina. That's the breakdown that we've had in this administration for the past eight years.

27:44 → 31:00 minutes

Angela Prince of Raleigh asked the question directed to Lt. Governor Perdue:
She would like to know how each candidate would handle the mental health care crisis.
Also with the recent cuts in available funds within the state, how would they take care of those still in need?

Perdue:

In North Carolina the whole system in my mind needs to be fixed; it is not working. I clearly understand that and I will begin immediately to fix the system. Again healthcare is a passion with me and the mental health system, as you know, involves three specific pieces. It's not just mental illness – it's mental illness, it's developmental disabilities, its substance abuse.

And folks in all three of those platforms of the mental health system need better services. I'd go back and be sure that there are always community services in place to sustain people within the community. And if they are not, I'd change the system that is there now. I think you can have public services in rural parts of North Carolina – there are private providers – the private sector just can't serve all of the needs in rural North Carolina.

And then I would absolutely give every person in the system, regardless of why, a case manager, a coordinator like we have done in the traditional Medicaid health program. So there is somebody there, an advocate to help guide them through the system, whether they are in an institution or whether they are in the community.

And finally, I would be sure that every person within the mental health system had a strong advocate, if the family can't be present and advocate for them, then everybody needs to be sure that there is somebody looking out for them. North Carolina has a

tremendous responsibility to take care of our most vulnerable and needed people and some of the folks in our mental health institutions are that. I'll fix that.

McCrory:

Well that's a great question and the current administration and the current leadership of North Carolina has totally failed in the area of mental health at a tremendous cost first to the taxpayers, but even more seriously, we've had some people and some patients harmed by this.

I think the first step we must do is some immediate, short-term steps, and that is not reduce the number of beds that are available in our mental health care hospitals, and that's exactly what this administration was going to do until some legislators and others stopped the closing of Dorothea Dix Hospital. And what we ought to do is not set any time or closing date for Dorothea Dix and we also have to now re-open Broughton and we now may have another concern with another hospital where we had a death just yesterday. We have to get those re-licensed, we have to look at the procedures.

We have to look at the work force. And one way we can do this is we need to immediately start rewarding some of our universities and two-year schools and encourage them to graduate mental health care workers. Because that is a major challenge right now. We can't find the labor to take care of the growing mental health care needs in North Carolina – to even staff the hospitals that we have available.

But we don't need to continue the decentralization especially in the rural areas because they do not have the resources available. And that is exactly what was done in the past two to three years.