

# PEMHS' PULSE

FEBRUARY 2013



## *From The Desk Of The CEO*

I found this article by David Cobbs of Bridgeway Center to echo our concerns here in Pinellas. I would like to share this with you.

### **GUEST COLUMN: Psychological Health Care: Too Close To The Edge**

People in Okaloosa County should worry about what's going on in Florida regarding Medicaid psychological health care. Florida's direct service providers for psychological health care will be in a severe recession if Gov. Rick Scott declines to participate in the Affordable Care Act. It is a classic business finance crunch, as the values of the assets of nonprofit organizations and their ability to deliver services to the needy continually decrease. Why would anybody want to increase the psychological health illnesses of poverty? Uninsured people may not receive treatment if Florida elects to not participate in expanding Medicaid that is 100 percent funded by the federal government for the first three years. This is a historic moment. Business math should rule over political party ideology. It is pro-patient, pro-taxpayer and pro-public safety. Bridgeway Center, Inc. is remarkably linked to public safety via the Baker Act, the Marchman Act, Crisis/Emergency Services and Bridgeway Center services, as well as Emergency Medical Services of Okaloosa County and the 18 law enforcement agencies in Okaloosa County, is extraordinary. The risks are real! Most recently, we are looking at what we think are patients who are getting more violent and psychotic because of illegal substances including "bath salts" and "spice", which can produce seizures, paranoia and other permanent psychiatric and physical disorders. Individuals who experiment with bath salts and spice are primarily 12 to 29 years old; most are in their teens. Physical harm to self and others is real. The volume of consumers screened in Crisis/Emergency Services each year is approximately 3,000. Bridgeway Center is an integral part of critical public safety services. Okaloosa County has not received an increase in Department of Children and Families (DCF) Substance Abuse Mental Health funding or even an inflation factor increase for more than 15 years. It costs approximately \$3 million per year to operate only emergency/inpatient services, which includes food services. However, DCF funding for all Bridgeway Center services for inpatient, case management and physician outpatient medication management has remained flat at \$3.1 million for over 15 years. The takeaway: This creates less access and less treatment for consumers and causes higher costs for Okaloosa County's hospitals and jail. The following fact from Bob Sharpe, President & CEO of the Florida Council for Community Mental Health, highlights the crisis:

- Florida is ranked last or 50<sup>th</sup> in the nation for state funding per capita for mental health.