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At the Pointe

Alabama Gulf Coast Heart Walk

Saturday, Sept. 13,
Mobile County
Saturday, Sept. 27,
Baldwin County
Call 665-2532 to join
a team!

Mental Health First Aid

Tuesday, Sept. 16
Call 450-4340
to reserve a spot.

AltaPointe Developmental Disability Awareness Fair 'Stepping Into Independence'

Saturday, Sept. 20
Call 450-4346 for info.

Mental Health Awareness Week

Oct. 5-11

Historic merger brings overnight growth, strength

AltaPointe Health Systems and Baldwin County Mental Health Center made history this spring when the two became the first community mental health centers in Alabama to merge. The merger already has created advantages for AltaPointe and the people it serves.

"AltaPointe experienced overnight growth with this merger," **Tuerk Schlesinger**, CEO, said. "Baldwin County added nearly 150 experienced staff members to AltaPointe's employment role and increased our capacity with facilities, services and community relationships."

An agreement that it was time to merge came after months of negotiation between the two boards; the merger becoming official April 1, 2014.

"Over time, it became obvious to both entities that a merger was necessary," **Julie Bellcase**, chief of staff, said. "Simply put, BCMH did not have the means to increase revenue, build a stronger infrastructure and buy vital technology; AltaPointe needed to grow stronger in size and scope. Both organizations were ready to build a larger, financially stronger organization that could withstand the changing healthcare environment."

Other factors that created a need to merge included the Affordable Care Act potential expansion of Medicaid roles and the planned Alabama Medicaid managed care system, which will generate increased competition.

"I am very confident we are prepared above and beyond any other mental health center in the state for



Tuerk Schlesinger, AltaPointe CEO, and Robin Riggins, AltaPointe's new executive director of community behavioral health services, brought AltaPointe and Baldwin County Mental Health together in the first merger of its kind in Alabama. Here they stand atop one of Mobile's high rises with downtown Mobile and Baldwin County's eastern shore in the background.

managed care," **Robin Riggins**, AltaPointe Executive Director of Community Behavioral Health Services and former BCMH executive director, said. "We are headed in the right direction. Other than issues expected with any merger, the process has seemed to go smoothly."

Please see Merger Comments Pages 6-9.

TransAge Resident: 'There can be life after adversity'

Editor's note: In the essay that follows, an 18-year-old woman describes her traumatic experiences and her journey to hope and recovery.

Adversity is a misfortune or difficulty faced by a person or group. People everywhere struggle with adversity every day: racial adversity, gender adversity, and criminal adversity are all major problems. By showing my connection with adversity, explaining the severity of this issue in this country, and finally, by showing how people who, just like I am, are overcoming these obstacles, I hope to help you understand how, not just our country, but YOU can respond.

At 12, I was faced with a tragedy that no one should ever have to endure – sexual abuse. At a devastatingly

young age my innocence was stripped from me. I was left scared, confused, and very much alone to deal with the aftermath. Over the next few years, I sank into a deep depression and was overcome with unbelievable amounts of anxiety. Soon enough though, I felt nothing. I became nothing more than the mask I put on every day. I thought that if no one else saw my pain then it wasn't real. Much like a soldier back from combat, my demons kept coming back and with a growing vengeance.

See Life after adversity Page 12

Merger produces seamless, consistent system amid changes



Turk Schlesinger,
CEO

The merger with Baldwin County Mental Health Center April 1, 2014, injected the already excellent behavioral healthcare system of AltaPointe Health Systems with instantaneous leadership and clinical quality. This incredible opportunity also has created one seamless and consistent system from which we can prepare for the evolution of healthcare happening around us and to us.

Timing for the merger was driven by our need to come together as one, unified corporation, and to give us time to work out the bugs that may arise after a merger. Having at least one full year before Medicaid Managed Care begins allows us to prepare for what will require another complete system change.

Nonprofit mergers have been compared to marriages with both parties bringing assets, and liabilities, into a common union. In that respect, we were fortunate to have two organizations combining tremendous assets. In fact, this union has brought together all the right conditions that allow us to become stronger than we ever dreamed.

The blending of cultures

Before the merger, our AltaPointe administration spent a lot of time researching the BCMH culture, asking ourselves questions about how our two cultures would blend to become one. Research showed that negative stories about mergers between two organizations were common. The literature led us to believe we should anticipate the worst and hope for the best. With this merger, however, we definitely got the best.

We know that our new AltaPointe family in Baldwin County had to change their way of thinking overnight. One day you were scheduling appointments following one protocol. The next day everything had changed; you were faced with learning completely different procedures, software systems, what to say when answering the phones, not to mention meeting new managers and colleagues. You have done all this and much more with patience, respect and great attitudes.

If we could have provided you more notice we would have. Mergers happen within legal boundaries that prevent

announcements before an agreed upon date on which the merger would be official. Until that moment, negotiations had to be kept confidential.

We had hoped for more time to implement all the changes. But, in this case, we also were required to abide by requests from the Alabama Department of Mental Health to officially integrate all patient/consumer records and data reporting within a few days of the official April 1 date. This propelled us into non-stop work at many levels to push forward with little time to allow for adjustments.

Successes visible at many levels

Despite the many, sudden changes and the voluminous necessary tasks to bring our two companies into one, we have been “blown away” by the successes we see. The merger has been exciting and positive. Thank you.

When we walk the halls and ask how you are doing, we want to hear every comment, no matter how small, because it gives us insight into things we might be missing. You may know just the step to take that would make this transition even more seamless. Do not hesitate to let us know what you think.

At the governance level, we always have respected Baldwin County Mental Health and its desire to grow, and we knew the BCMH board of directors was strong. Our expectations of their strength and dedication were exceeded. The quality of the board’s work has been incredible through the entire merger process, and the two boards have come together comfortably. That’s another positive.

Underpinning all the changes and the integration of operations and service provision, we have been putting a new structure in place to support the consistent vision resulting from our merger. We believe this structure will bring about a blended culture based on the clinical quality, visionary leadership, innovation and superior customer service of both BCMH and AltaPointe.

This larger, stronger AltaPointe Health Systems is primed to meet head on the challenges before us with an optimistic belief that we will succeed in providing even better and more successful care. May this union have many years of fulfillment and success! Congratulations to us.

CarePointe CORNER

Merger affects number of calls received at CarePointe

Since the April 1 merger of AltaPointe and Baldwin County Mental Health, there has been a 60 percent increase in calls to CarePointe, AltaPointe’s call center.

“We were expecting at least 800 more calls per month based on BCMH’s historical daytime call volume,” **Ingrid Hartman**, CarePointe Assistant Director, said. “On average, we field about 1,750-1,800 calls in a two-week period or 3,500-3,600 calls a month, so we expected 4,800 calls in May.”

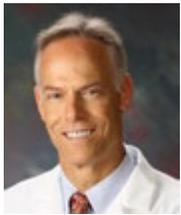
However, the data for May showed CarePointe receiving 2,355 calls during the two-week period following the merger with a total of 5,033 calls for the month of May.

In June, calls dipped to 4,681, an amount that still exceeds the monthly calls received from January to April 2014. In July, the total number jumped to the highest level ever with 5,105 calls answered. CarePointe’s after-hours calls also have increased; a trend that Hartman expects to continue.

CarePointe receives tens of thousands of phone calls each year, most of which involve mental health, substance abuse, or social service resource questions.

Hartman emphasized that AltaPointe staff members would receive a more timely response if they call the CarePointe provider phone line, which clinical supervisors should have.

Bravo! Bravo!



W. Bogan Brooks

W. Bogan Brooks, MD, was named to the University of South Alabama Chapter of the Arnold P. Gold Humanism in Medicine Honor Society. The USA College of Medicine Class of 2015 selects those who have demonstrated excellence in clinical care, leadership, compassion and dedication to service.

LeMoyne School students made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), during the 2013-2014 school year, according to Jennifer Burns, BayPointe School Day Treatment coordinator. The major tool for determining this is state testing. This year was the first time LeMoyne students have been able to complete state testing in one week's time, and the first time students have taken the ACT ASPIRE test.

Michelle Dunson Eddins, MS, has earned her master's degree in counseling from the University of South Alabama. Eddins also has been promoted to CarePointe hospital admissions and referral coordinator. She previously held the title of aftercare and referral specialist.

Terrell Dennis, finance and accounting insurance clerk, has earned a bachelor's degree in business administration from the University of Mobile.

Congratulations to **Dorothy Givens**, **Rose Olmstead**, and **Rita Tunstall**, who all retired after a combined 52 years of service to the field of mental healthcare. All three are Baldwin County Mental Health legacy employees who joined AltaPointe when the two

organizations merged April 1. **Givens** worked as a clerk for 17 years. **Olmstead** worked as an administrative assistance for 16 years. Tunstall retired after 29 years of service and worked briefly as CarePointe specialist after joining AltaPointe. "They each will be remembered for all their hard work and dedication to the people of Baldwin County who live with mental illness," Robin Riggins, AltaPointe Executive Director of Community Behavioral Health Service, said. "We appreciate their efforts and wish them the best."

Sandra Parker, MD, AltaPointe Chief Medical Officer, along with **Olivia Nettles**, children's outpatient director, and **Stephanie Gatlin**, former children's outpatient coordinator, presented information on AltaPointe's school-based therapy at the National Association of School Nurses conference in San Antonio, Texas, in July. Dr. Wanda Hannon, supervisor for health and social services for Mobile County Public School System, asked them to present "Healthy Kids, Schools, and Communities: A Collaborative Model for Integrated School-based Mental Health Services" to help others replicate this model in the school setting. They were joined by Denise Reimer, a MCPSS social worker, and Jennifer Langhinrichsen-Rohling, PhD.



LuCreasia McCall

LuCreasia McCall, consumer needs specialist for adult outpatient services, was recognized in the *Probate Court Reporter* publication for her hard work and dedication when it comes to serving people living with mental illness.

HR deems new API software a success

The implementation of API Healthcare at AltaPointe began in June and by all appearances has been a success. The human resources information software system allows the AltaPointe Human Resources Department to streamline all its processes through a single solution.

"Considering the size of the project and all the pieces involved, I think it is going well,"

Jason Holston, human resources assistant director, said. "With help from our managers and employees, we have worked out many of the kinks within API. Our first payroll was a success, minus a few small issues."

API is not only integrated within itself, but with other patient-care systems to give supervisors detailed data right at their fingertips, which in turn, will make forecasting daily staffing decisions more efficient. The benefits trickle down to the employee



Deborah Fountain, medical records, starts her day out at BayPointe Hospital using the new API time clock.

by giving them access to self-service features.

"Self-service features allow employees to take charge of all of their personal information such as address, phone number, emergency contacts," Holston added. "We've already had employees changing their information through the self-service website."

Alicia Donoghue, human resources director, says staff scheduling, the next phase of API, has been introduced at EastPointe Hospital.

"The staff scheduling portion allows staff members more input and flexibility developing their work schedules," Donoghue said. "It allows

them to trade shifts with co-workers, request shifts, and play a more active role in their work schedule."

Donoghue says the staff scheduling portion will be rolled out to other 24-hour divisions in the coming months.

People & Positions at the Pointe



Robin Riggins

Robin Riggins, LCSW, has joined AltaPointe as Executive Director of Community Behavioral Health Services. She served as Baldwin County Mental Health Executive Director and was appointed to the new position after the AltaPointe and Baldwin County Mental Health merger April 1. She earned a bachelor's degree in social work and a master's degree in social work from the University of Alabama. The licensed certified social worker is a Baldwin County Alabama Free Clinic board member as well as a Jennifer-Claire Moore Foundation board member.



Milton Burke

Milton Burke, MBA, joined AltaPointe in the new position of Chief Quality Officer in which he has oversight of performance improvement, CarePointe, and centralized services. Burke has more than 27 years of professional quality and utilization management and managed care experience in both not-for-profit and for-profit behavioral health, rehabilitative health and child

welfare settings. Burke worked with Mobile Mental Health as director of performance improvement from 1997 to 2000, before returning to Florida. He is credited with beginning the Access to Care Department and developed performance improvement activities including consumer needs and utilization review processes at a time when we were in managed care. Most recently, he was the regional director of quality management for Children's Home Society of Florida, Inc. Burke completed his undergraduate studies at Huntingdon College in Montgomery and received his master's degree from Emory University in Atlanta. He is a peer reviewer for the Council on Accreditation and is certified as a Quality Assurance Reviewer for the Florida Department of Children and Families.

Cindy Gipson, PhD, LPC, has been promoted to assistant director of intensive services after serving as the coordinator for Crisis Response Team (CRT) and the Assertive Community Treatment team (ACT). Gipson previously worked at Searcy State Hospital and for the Williamson County Texas Mobile Crisis Outreach team as a therapist in conjunction with the sheriff's department and the local mental health authority. Gipson earned a



Cindy Gipson

bachelor's degree in tourism and commercial recreation, a master's degrees in recreation therapy and a master's degree in counseling from the University of South Alabama. She also holds a doctorate in psychology from the University of Texas at Austin.

Jason Tanner, LCSW, has joined AltaPointe as the children's outpatient services assistant director. He was appointed to this position following the April 1 merger of AltaPointe and Baldwin County Mental Health where he served as clinical director of children's services and overall clinical director. Tanner also worked for Mobile Mental Health as a therapist in substance abuse and

mental health services and as a coordinator of residential substance abuse services. Tanner earned a bachelor's degree in social work from the University of Tennessee and a master's degree in social work from the University of Southern Mississippi.



Halie Jones

Halie Jones, LPC, MS, has been hired as the new assistant director of adult outpatient substance abuse services. Jones comes to AltaPointe via Saving Grace Home for Women where she served as its program director. She earned a bachelor's degree in human environmental sciences from the University of Alabama and a master's degree in mental health counseling from Lee University.

Krista Thronson, MS, has been appointed as the coordinator of intensive teams in Baldwin County for adult outpatient services. Thronson joined AltaPointe in April, following the merger with Baldwin County Mental Health where she served as a therapist in the Foley outpatient office. She holds a bachelor's of science in criminal justice with a minor in psychology from St. Thomas University. Thronson earned a master's in mental health counseling from Walden University.

Tonya R. Baker, RHIA, has joined AltaPointe as the new health information coordinator, a performance improvement position. Baker earned her bachelor's degree in health information management from the University of Alabama at Birmingham. She comes to AltaPointe from Stringfellow Memorial Hospital where she served as the clinical documentation improvement specialist. Baker is a registered health information administrator (RHIA).



Suren Naiker

Suren Naiker has joined AltaPointe as the new inpatient business analyst in the information technology department. Naiker comes to AltaPointe from Spring Hill College where he was an instructional design specialist. He earned a bachelor's degree in history and a master's degree in psychology from Durban-Westville University in South Africa. Naiker also holds an associate's degree in computer information systems from Parkland College in Illinois.



Suren Naiker

Ericka Hendricks, MBA, has joined AltaPointe as the new outpatient analyst in the information technology department. Hendricks comes to AltaPointe via CDR Associates, LLC, where she served as its senior recovery contract analyst. She earned a bachelor's degree in healthcare administration from American Intercontinental University and completed the master's in business administration healthcare management program at Benedictine University.

AltaPointe leaders comment on merger experiences

The April 1, 2014 merger of AltaPointe Health Systems and Baldwin County Mental Health Center was a milestone for mental health organizations across the state of Alabama, not just for AltaPointe. Some of AltaPointe's leaders and managers responded to questions from AltaNews about their experiences and opinions about the merger. The following interviews are written in their own words and appear in no particular order.



From left, Robert Carlock, Julie Bellcase, Olivia Nettles and Dr. Sandra Parker.

Julie Bellcase, Chief of Staff

Status at the time of the merger

I had been involved in the first, informal discussion with Robin Riggins, then the executive director of Baldwin County Mental Health (BCMh), about a merger. That was in 2010. It took years of discussions, negotiations and working with BCMh administration and board members plus the appointing bodies to bring us to the April 1, 2014 merger. My most active role in the merger began in February 2014 as I became involved in the mechanics of making it happen; such as meeting all the legal requirements, getting the appropriate legal documents in order so we could file the papers on time, dealing with various authorities. It was my job to keep the merger on track, working with Tuerk to make sure all the necessary steps were followed and updating ADMH and other organizations.

Benefits of the merger

1/ Our size allows us to more adequately address the needs of the people who live throughout this region. Baldwin County services are now sustainable. 2/ AltaPointe has brought electronic medical records, the information technology and capital required to streamline services, improve facilities and increase operational efficiencies. 3/ In combination with other factors, this means more individuals can benefit from our services and lead higher quality lives, which was something BCMh very much wanted to do. 4/

Also, the employees in Baldwin County can be more specialized in their work because of the efficiencies and structure the merger has brought.

Challenges of the merger

1/ The greatest challenge for leadership and managers has been remembering our two pre-merged organizations' values and traditions and shaping them into a culture we all can live within. 2/ Baldwin County staff members having to endure so many changes all at once was a tremendous challenge. 3/ Meeting the deadline set by the ADMH and gaining the support and approval from all the appointing bodies from the three counties was challenging.

One thing I learned from the merger

It's more like I was continually mindful rather than learning from this, but it kept coming to me that people value their accomplishments and how they arrived at those accomplishments. We always need to be respectful and attentive to those values and the history of each organization.

Sandra Parker, Chief Medical Officer

Status at the time of the merger

We were very busy staffing every clinical area of AltaPointe. Now, we have medical staff who had worked for Baldwin County Mental Health. The physicians and CRNPs who already worked for AltaPointe are enjoying getting to know their new colleagues.

Benefits of the merger

I see a great benefit to the people of Baldwin County through the streamlined access to behavioral healthcare through CarePointe and the implementation and use of the electronic medical record. These two assets will greatly improve the quality of care our patients receive.

Challenges of the merger

Based on my role in the merger, flexibility and patience have been important. This, combined with being able to see each individual's viewpoint, has been crucial to the smooth transition of this merger.

One thing I have learned from the merger

We needed to put great effort into planning for the merger, which I think we did. Also, it is important to develop relationships with the community and our new staff members in Baldwin County.

Robert Carlock, Director of Environment of Care

Status at the time of the merger

We employed 10 staff members and managed 12 major facilities. The EOC team had been well trained, and an electronic maintenance system had been put in place to increase efficiencies.

Merger Comments continued on page 6

Benefits of the merger

The merger allowed EOC to add three additional staff members with two dedicated to Baldwin County properties. Because of AltaPointe's electronic maintenance system and other resources, the Baldwin County side will see maintenance needs met faster. Our new Baldwin County staff members and patients have safer environments because of the electronic compliance software.

Challenges of the merger

The number one challenge has been and will continue to be emergency preparedness. 1/ We are spread geographically in Mobile County from Bayou La Batre to Mt. Vernon and in Baldwin County from Foley to Bay Minette. In addition, we also have a clinic in Chatom. 2/ We have brought the Baldwin properties to AltaPointe's standards, which include EOC, safety and life safety. We will be preparing Baldwin properties for Joint Commission accreditation in these areas.

One thing I have learned from the merger

BCMh was doing a great job with its resources. Now, combined with the resources AltaPointe brought to the merger, the Baldwin County side of AltaPointe will be even more efficient.



David Beech and Sherill Alexander

Olivia Nettles, Director of Children's Outpatient Services

Status at the time of the merger

At the time of the merger children's outpatient services (COP) had 100 staff members based at our Bishop Lane/Old Shell Road location.

Benefits of the merger

1/ We gained really good clinicians from Baldwin County's children's outpatient services. There were a total of 44 staff members, clinical and non-clinical, who previously had worked at BCMH. 2/ The merger gave us the opportunity to restructure. We added one assistant director and now have a total of five coordinators, some of whom oversee specific services for both

counties, some for one county. 3/ We now offer substance abuse prevention services for adolescents, a day treatment program and a parenting program (REAP) that services parents of children up to age 12. 4/ With the addition of BCMH, AltaPointe now provides school-based mental health services in six school systems.

Challenges of the merger

Integrating Baldwin County patient records into our electronic medical records (EMR) was a challenge. Clinically, we are more alike and are now working to get the procedures to coincide; Baldwin County had different processes since it did not have EMR.

One thing I have learned from the merger

I have learned that I would ask about the other party's procedures before making changes. If we had understood all BCMH did in children's outpatient on day one, the transition would have started better. The Mobile side of AltaPointe can learn a great deal from the former BCMH.

Sherill Alexander, Director of Performance Improvement

Status the time of the merger

Our department had started moving toward increased automation. We had embarked on implementing "RL Solutions," an incident management and consumer feedback electronic system that identifies trends and areas of risk.

Benefits of the merger

Baldwin County patients will benefit from evidenced-based practices, such as, dialectical behavior therapy and illness recovery management, treatment methods used in Mobile.

Challenges of the merger

Our biggest challenge has been communication. We plan to identify weaknesses and put something into place to ensure we have clear, consistent communication. 2/ We must develop ways to monitor compliance of new programs and additional patients effectively. 3/ Preparing Baldwin County to become accredited by Joint Commission will be a challenge, but one that we welcome.

One thing I have learned from the merger

Technology is vital to integration of services and the backbone of our organization becoming efficient and quality driven.

David Beech, Director of Adult Residential Services

Status at the time of the merger

The staff members who have worked for some time at AltaPointe Adult Residential Services had been accustomed to change and growth. I felt like we were ahead of the game because of that. At the time of the merger, ARS managed 181 beds in 21 scattered-site group homes.



From left, Megan Griggs, Alicia Donoghue, Heather Joseph and Kevin Markham

Benefits of merger

AltaPointe now has four additional group homes located in Baldwin County and operates 227 beds, which gives us more placement options. In early July, we took a patient from Mobile to visit one of the Baldwin County group homes. She immediately wanted to move there. The Baldwin County homes are rural with fewer external distractions, which is beneficial to many residents.

Challenges related to the merger

1/ My Mobile-based administrative staff has had to travel in order to work with our Baldwin County team. Video conferencing will change this need. 2/ Baldwin staff members changed to 12-hour shifts, from 8-hour shifts. They have transitioned well. 3/ We assessed both the existing systems to see how they could be integrated. Implementing the AltaPointe processes and systems for basic living skills, home management, adding computer kiosks and switching to electronic records were challenging to accomplish in the tight timeframe.

One thing I have learned from the merger

We learned that being sensitive to our new colleagues' feelings, their culture and their systems was a top priority. We managed our tasks by prioritizing what we could tackle each day or week and communicated with Baldwin managers so they would know what to expect.

Kevin Markham, Chief Financial Officer

Status at the time of the merger

We had been working to increase specialization in our department and needed to increase our staff. The merger allowed us to add an assistant controller, a billing clerk, new purchasing staff, and a money management clerk from among the Baldwin County Mental Health (BCMh) employees.

Benefits of the merger

The merger will make AltaPointe stronger and better positioned to navigate the changing healthcare environment. 1/ We have an even

greater presence in the region. Adding an entire county of nearly 140,000 people is a lot of responsibility as well as an opportunity. Our size gives us the foundation to be a player in the world of behavioral and integrated healthcare. 2/ Also, we have an even more diverse array of funding sources making us less dependent on one single source and the ability to serve even more people.

Challenges of the merger

It has been a challenge to learn the BCMh organization's funding sources and the details of its contracts. 1/ We needed to learn about its programs and services that are different from what AltaPointe was operating. 2/ It was vital that we learned for what services we are contracted and to be in compliance with the grantors. 3/ Billing and transitioning info from their computer system into ours was a huge undertaking.

One thing I have learned

We are better prepared for another merger having done one this size. In a lot of respects it was harder than we anticipated; I knew it would be a large undertaking. It didn't disappoint my expectations. I learned the importance of coordination between IT, HR, practice management and administration when educating our new employees on completely different systems. Baldwin County staff members deserve a lot of credit for making this a successful transition.

Alicia Donoghue, Director of Human Resources

Status at the time of the merger

We had been working for months on the new API software for human resources. Our resources, including our 10 staff members, were stretched thin. HR needed to integrate all its systems for the merger by March 31.

Benefits to the merger

1/ The HR department gained a new staff member with Kim Williams, HR director of former BCMh. 2/ AltaPointe's increased size increases our sustainability, gives greater purchasing power and helps us prepare better for changes coming in healthcare. 3/ Baldwin County employees have benefitted from time clocks and employee self-service access online. 4/ Existing methods of communication, such as, email, AltaNews employee newsletter and AltaLink intranet postings are beneficial to our new family. 5/ We gained much sought-after clinical and other qualified and talented staff members, without recruiting. 6/ Employees have been given opportunities to consider working closer to their homes and to explore new areas of employment.

Challenges of the merger

1/ We worked to familiarize nearly 150 new staff members with AltaPointe, visiting remote sites and meeting with them in a very tight timeframe. New employees could not access the posted HR policy changes for a while. 2/ The HR and IT teams had to build structures for new cost centers and pay codes as part of a transition plan to make sure new staff members were paid until time clocks

were installed. The Baldwin County staff members had so much change in such a short time; that had to have been difficult for them.

One thing I have learned from the merger

I would have communicated differently and distributed more information to our new staff members so they would know what to expect. There were so many unknowns that we could not have anticipated. At the drop of a hat our HR team would shift from daily priorities to be available to do what needed to be done.

Megan Griggs, Director of Adult Outpatient Services

Status at the time of the merger

At the time of the merger, there were 112 adult outpatient services (AOP) staff members based at four offices in Mobile and Washington counties. We had been discussing ways to restructure adult outpatient services to better manage programs and services.

Benefits of the merger

1/ AOP restructured some positions adding two assistant directors for a total of four, and two coordinators also for a total of four. 2/ We have a lot of opportunity to expand services in Baldwin County and, potentially, could market to physicians and agencies to draw referrals. 3/ AOP gained three outpatient offices plus a day treatment program and some very conscientious staff members, who are eager to learn our procedures. 4/ Baldwin County's adolescent substance abuse program is something new for AltaPointe. AOP will oversee the program.

Challenges of the merger

Communication between clinical and administrative areas was the biggest challenge to which the short timeframe to integrate services contributed. There was so much to accomplish.

One thing I have learned from the merger

If we were to go through another merger, I would know to delay some changes and to avoid others completely.

Heather Joseph, Chief Administrative Officer

Status at the time of the merger

We already had changed outpatient services' front desk operations by having office professionals verify demographic and insurance information and encouraging staff members to make customer service top of mind. Our consumers need our assistance; making them feel welcome will give them a positive patient experience.

Benefits of the merger

Considering AltaPointe's resources and its technological and administrative strengths, the Baldwin County area will seek out our services when it is learned services have been expanded.

Challenges of the merger

Making the cultural transition has been the biggest challenge. To use a familiar analogy to describe our cultural differences, there is more than one way to bake a cake. In addition, the management



From left, Ingrid Hartman, Steve Dolan and Robin Riggins

structure created a bit of confusion. Had staff members been given each department's organizational chart, this could have likely helped.

One thing I have learned from the merger

Assumptions about how the merger was going to go and the reality of the situation were vastly different. I thought there was no way we could pull off a strategic union. It was our IT Department's role and constant communication that made this work. Dedicated IT staff worked 24/7 providing support for all we had to accomplish. What we have accomplished is truly impressive.

Steve Dolan, Chief Information Officer

Status at the time of the merger

Our IT department had several major projects climaxing at the same time — API, the new HR system, and moving the server structure to the Cloud, among others. The merger came at a time when we had stretched our resource pool in preparation for what we were already doing. Our department had to take a truly creative approach to get the work accomplished.

Benefits of the merger

1/ The merger allowed IT to add two staff members to work the help desk. We also added analysts for inpatient and outpatient services. 2/ Our Baldwin County locations have gained capabilities and equipment that would have taken years to put in place. 3/ And, the Baldwin County community and patients will benefit from the new infrastructure, which includes electronic medical records that will allow clinicians to provide more services.

Challenges from the merger

1/ The tight timeframe and the speed at which we were required to work was a challenge. 2/ AltaPointe has become more specialized with new leadership and management positions in place, which means we can't use the same channels we once used. 3/ We have new AltaPointe family members whom we need to make

comfortable and to train in the use of the tools that are new to them. We want them to understand the proper protocols for support so we can be responsive. 4/ Meeting the IT needs within three counties has been a challenge, but our team has regained its footing.

One thing I have learned from the merger

While we would have liked more time to plan, I have learned that when necessary our team will buckle down, work extra hours and nights to meet deadlines that do not seem possible to attain. I also have learned that communicating and collaborating with other key departments that are equally motivated makes successes possible.

Ingrid Hartman, Assistant Director of CarePointe

Status at the time of the merger

CarePointe had planned to create some new positions, cross-train others and hire new staff members since calls to CarePointe had increased by nearly 1,000 per month. CarePointe now has 20 staff members, which is double the number of CarePointe staff since Searcy closed October 2012.

Benefits of the merger

1/ We now know which patients AltaPointe and Baldwin County Mental Health had been sharing. Now we have accurate records of the progress these individuals have made. 2/ We can accommodate patients who want an appointment sooner than the first available in Mobile by scheduling an appointment for them in Baldwin County. 3/ Our continuum now includes programs that AltaPointe did not offer before the merger, and we can provide more of the existing services within a larger geographic area.

Challenges related to merger

1/ The greatest challenge for CarePointe has been scheduling appointments at the Baldwin County sites and learning what services are offered where. 2/ On top of this, there has been the need to quickly learn and understand each other's culture. CarePointe and Baldwin County staff members needed to understand how scheduling processes and access to care differed and develop ways to communicate to make sure no one's appointment was lost during the transition.

One thing I have learned from the merger

I have a really great team. CarePointe staff members stepped up with great, flexible can-do attitudes. We knew we could make the changes work. Their attitudes made it easier to understand that the quick turnarounds and fast-paced workload were temporary.

Think about **this...**

“Whenever you see a successful business, someone once made a courageous decision.”

— Peter F. Drucker

Robin Riggins, Executive Director of Community Behavioral Health Services

Formerly Executive Director of Baldwin County Mental Health

Status at time of merger

Baldwin County Mental Health had for the last several years reached capacity for providing expanded or new services. We provided excellent services within our scope, and we were very proud of those services, but wanted to do more. We wanted to expand services on multiple levels, such as to correctional facilities and law enforcement in all municipalities, and to create a private counseling component. However, we had no financial or physical capacity to do so. I had discussed the benefits of merging with Tuerk Schlesinger at least three years ago. BCMH knew we needed to change to more of a business model to survive. We chose to merge before we really had to because we knew what we could gain from AltaPointe's advancement and sophistication.

Tuerk is well-respected for his vision of what's on the horizon, how healthcare works. I feel fortunate we had this opportunity with AltaPointe with someone like Tuerk at the helm.

Benefits of the merger

1/ The concern and support of the BCMH Board of Directors were crucial in the decision to merge. Making sure our consumers and staff were taken care of was their priority. The addition of BCMH board members to the AltaPointe board is a huge benefit. 2/ The Baldwin County side of AltaPointe gained experienced leadership, increased manpower and high levels of expertise all rolled into a challenging and cutting-edge environment. Implementation of the electronic medical record and CarePointe system have been the most obvious of many necessary benefits for Baldwin County staff and patients.

Challenges of the merger

1/ Not being able to discuss the merger with our staff members throughout the process was difficult. When we announced the merger, they understood it was necessary. Yet, they naturally had some ambivalence about becoming part of a larger system. 2/ It has been somewhat surreal as I try to establish my role at AltaPointe. It is similar to what I did before, but the magnitude and capacity are much greater. I now oversee double the number of staff members and programs including oversight for developmental disability case management, a service that BCMH did not provide. 4/ My greatest challenge has been learning to utilize the many resources, expertise and manpower now at my fingertips. Before, I had to focus on making sure immediate needs were met. Now, I am able to plan and help develop new programs rather than just sustaining. The shift to a culture of change has been necessary for survival in this new healthcare environment and surprisingly exciting.

One thing I learned from the merger

Looking back, we could have made decisions more cohesively. We did not anticipate the trouble spots until they appeared.

Program Progress

BayPointe Hospital

24-bed adult unit opens at BayPointe

BayPointe Hospital opened a 24-bed adult treatment program in July. Patients admitted voluntarily will receive treatment on the “400 Unit” that had been housing adolescent girls.

AltaPointe opened the unit in response to requests for adult psychiatric beds in Mobile from acute care hospitals, referral sources and other providers in the community.

The conversion of this unit in no way affects the bed availability or quality of care provided by BayPointe to children and teens

in crisis. Thirty-six beds will continue to be dedicated for the treatment of children and teens.

“Our first consideration was to assure that BayPointe would be able to continue meeting the demands for children’s beds,” **Tuerk Schlesinger**, CEO, said. “The facility has accommodated both children and adults before; we will structure the treatment programs to be operated separately as we did previously.”

Children’s Outpatient Services

Children enjoy summer of fun while continuing treatment

AltaPointe’s six-week, summer day camp offered fun and a healthy environment for 50 children while they continued their outpatient treatment. The camp was operated by children’s outpatient (COP) services and housed at Leinkauf Elementary School in Mobile.

Designed to meet the needs of children and adolescents with behavioral management issues, the camp’s goal was to provide extra support to assist the campers that need help functioning in everyday social situations. Campers enjoyed arts and crafts, outdoor activities and music events.

Tina Williams, assessment specialist and case manager, says the children ranged from 5 to 18 years of age and were referred by a COP therapist. “Summer day treatment patients are usually struggling with more difficult emotional and psychological issues that require a specific standard of care suited to their diagnoses,” added Williams.

Each day the kids had an opportunity to participate in individual therapy as well as group therapy. They took therapeutic

field trips, learned infection control and personal care skills. The camp also offered family support and education by teaching behavioral interventions.

TransAge residents take center stage at talent show

AltaPointe’s transitional age residents took center stage for a talent show in June. A variety of acts performed, including singers, a poet, and a magician. **Zina May**, NAMI Mobile president; **Eddie Pratt**, children’s outpatient assistant coordinator; and **Katherine Kendall**, case manager, judged the performances while local musician, Troy Brannon, served as emcee.



Justin Bussie engages Eddie Pratt, right, in one of his amazing card tricks that he performed during the TransAge Talent Show at AltaPointe Children’s Outpatient Services.

Kathy Rouse, transitional age coordinator, says the talent show allows participants to feel good about themselves, receive positive feedback and enjoy their peers.

“Deciding on a talent and participating gives them something positive to focus on and a chance to achieve a goal,” Rouse said. “Plus, it’s fun. Fun is a major need for all of us, especially young people. It relieves stress and encourages positive interactions.”

Rouse said the talent show is a casual venue in which participants display musical and other talents.



Children participate in COP’s summer day treatment camp in a fun and therapeutic environment.

Program Progress continued on page 11

Environment of Care

EOC prepares to weather the storm, and encourages you to do the same

Living along the Gulf Coast, AltaPointe staff members are no strangers to severe tropical weather. Since we are in the midst of hurricane season, it is a high priority for staff members to know how to be ready to respond in case 2014 is the year for that “big” storm. AltaPointe has a plan in place to prepare our facilities and hospitals for such an event and all employees also should have their own hurricane plans in place.

“Staffing the hospitals and group homes is a major concern for us when there is an imminent threat,” **Tuerk Schlesinger**, CEO, said. “AltaPointe expects all staff members to be available to work. In addition, though not scheduled, they may be called to work before or during a disaster.”



When preparing to work during a disaster each staff member needs to bring a minimum of a four-day supply of linens and clothes, sleeping supplies and toiletries along with any medications needed.

“AltaPointe’s administration realizes these situations can be difficult,” Schlesinger said. “It’s important for our staff members to know that their steadfastness and firm commitment to their jobs do not go unnoticed.”

AltaPointe’s Emergency Plan and Emergency Operations Plan are posted on the Environment of Care page on *AltaLink*, AltaPointe’s intranet, according to **Robert Carlock**, director of environment of care for AltaPointe.

Performance Improvement

PI launches paperless incident reporting system

The performance improvement (PI) department prepares to mark a major milestone, one that its director, **Sherill Alexander**, says is going to help PI run more efficiently. Come September, PI will go paperless with incident reporting and gathering patient feedback, which in turn, will improve overall patient safety and satisfaction.

“Words cannot fully express how we feel about this system,” Alexander said. “It is going to help us do a better job identifying and solving problems, and providing feedback to the programs.”

Staff members will be able to file incident reports and gather patient feedback immediately by using the new user-friendly software, RL Solutions Incident Management and Consumer Feedback System. This will help address events quickly, allow PI to pinpoint specific areas where help is needed and develop a plan for improvement.

It will streamline the incident report and patient feedback process alleviating the need to push papers from desk-to-desk.

Adult Residential Services

New training focuses on making staff-patient interactions more effective, positive

AltaPointe Adult Residential Services (ARS) has been working with Sarah Bauman, a University of South Alabama doctoral psychology intern, to pilot a new staff training program at Dogwood group home in Mt. Vernon. The goal of the training is to adjust staff-patient interactions so that they are more effective and positive. This will result in a number of benefits for patients, including less inappropriate and more appropriate behavior and increased independence, self-esteem and engagement in activities. At the same time, staff members will experience a decrease in stress and burnout, as well as a decrease in time spent dealing with crises and performing acts of daily living for patients. Ultimately, these changes will positively impact the group home environment.

The training includes an educational PowerPoint that teaches behavioral management strategies followed by real world practice of the skills with coaching and feedback. As a result of the program, the percentage of staff-patient interaction during the observation

periods has markedly increased. The staff-patient interactions are coded in three categories: labeled praise, non-labeled praise, and neutral interactions. These coded interactions have given the ARS managers data to help them assess how effective staff members are at implementing the pilot program.

Initially, the training was conducted with only a few staff members, including **Jerrica Wiley**, **Faye Cowen**, **Pam McConnell**, and **Torie French**.

“Those pioneer staff members did a wonderful job and were helpful in streamlining the process and making the training more effective,” **David Beech**, ARS director, said.

The training program recently expanded to include all Dogwood staff members. Bauman, and **David Dortch**, Dogwood Assistant Coordinator, are working to train other AltaPointe staff members in coaching and feedback sessions so ARS may continue to use the training program.

BCCA works to prevent underage drinking and drug use

Billboard competition encourages teen participation



Shelby Hill's art encourages peers not to drink or use drugs.

The Baldwin County Community Alliance, more frequently called BCCA, is a prevention program aimed at keeping children and teens from using alcohol and drugs. The BCCA operates under the AltaPointe umbrella since the

merger with Baldwin County Mental Health.

The BCCA is on a mission to stop underage drinking and substance abuse in Baldwin County, according to **Lantana McKenley**, the prevention program coordinator.

"BCCA relies on teens to drive home this message by hosting a number of contests aimed at young people 'just saying no,'" McKenley said. "One contest involves Baldwin County high school students showing off their artistic abilities by designing a billboard aimed at deterring underage drinking and substance abuse."

Shelby Hill of Foley High School was the first place winner. Lamar Advertising recreated the winning artwork on a billboard located in Baldwin County on Hwy. 59 between County Road 32 and the Foley Beach Express.

The BCCA was established in 2005 and comprises community agencies that develop strategies to target drinking and drug use among youth residing in Baldwin County.

BCCA is funded by an Alabama Department of Mental Health block grant and the Strategic Prevention Framework State Incentive Grant.

Health Matters

Check it out! The AltaPointe Performance Improvement (PI) Department wants to help you lead a healthier life. Starting this September, be sure to visit PI's page on *AltaLink* and participate in the 'PI Pop Quiz.' Enter correctly and you could win a prize.

Here's a sneak peak at what to expect on the quiz.

A full eight hours of sleep can reduce the risk of:

- A. weight gain
- B. stress
- C. irritability
- D. high blood pressure
- E. all of the above

*The correct answer is 'E.'

Life after adversity *continued from page 1*

Thinking about death is scary, but the thought that death may be better than life can be catastrophic. With my 15th birthday came a blow that landed me in a harsh reality. I was literally brought to my knees by emotions that my body was forcing out in any way possible. I had convulsions and catatonic phases that lasted for hours on end, and panic attacks that wracked my mind and pulled me back into darkness. That was the bottom. But, I was one of the lucky ones. I got help. Thus began my voyage back from hell.

PTSD – so now I have a label. And with that label came the support I needed to start living again. Sure, I am behind in school and, yes, I need medicine to help me stay in control, but I am alive, and that is what matters. For a while each step forward was exhausting and painful. There were plenty of times I wanted to give up and give in. But I didn't. I made it, and every day I'm getting stronger.

This strength is not something I developed alone. Along my journey, I connected with a multitude of people in similar situations. The realization that you are not alone and that there is hope is amazing. According to victimsofcrime.org, 16 out of every 1,000 children are victims of sexual abuse (CSA). RAINN.org says that 60 percent of all rapes are never reported, and 97 percent of rapists will never spend a

'I was one of the lucky ones. I got help.'



day in jail. This huge problem is really a disease that is devouring the innocence of our country's youth.

Knowing these statistics shows you how easy it was for me to find solace; I just looked around, asked and found many others just like me. Connecting with those people helped me to feel accepted, hopeful and excited for the future.

Six years of my life were spent under that cloak of terror. For others it is much, much longer. Even as the abuse and illness continues, those who have experienced it are reaching out and speaking to victims, sharing their stories and advocating for justice.

If you or someone you know is struggling with abuse and/or mental illness, I hope my story shows there is life after adversity. I am now a straight 'A' student and on my way to independence. Little things like driver's education and getting a job excite me. I think my fellow advocates would agree that looking back at the mountains you have climbed, looking forward at those to come, and looking down from the one you stand atop is the most rewarding feeling you may EVER have. You **can** let your anchor become your wings and soar straight above the heights you never thought possible.