

A newsletter for and about AltaPointe Health Systems' Employees

# AltaNews

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## Taking steps to stop opioid addiction

Pages 6-8





From our CEO...

## AltaPointe continuum often starts with ConsultPointe

AltaPointe's continuum of care often begins in one of the acute care hospitals across our region. When patients are admitted with behavioral health needs, we support these hospitals through a program we call ConsultPointe, our psychiatric consultation department. This gives patients an efficient and reliable consistency of care that is comforting to patients in medical and mental distress.

People are hospitalized for many reasons. We see the highest numbers of patients in hospital emergency departments, intensive care units and medical surgical units. They may be having acute psychiatric episodes and go to the ER. They could be having primary care medical issues accompanied by behavioral health issues. Individuals who overdose on drugs show up in hospital ERs needing consultations and stabilization.

These patients should and do receive professional psychiatric consultations in Mobile area hospitals that include Providence, Springhill, University of South Alabama Medical Center and USA Children's and Women's in Mobile County and Thomas Hospital in Baldwin County. ConsultPointe will begin a new contract with South Baldwin Regional Medical Center this fall. Our psychiatrists work with primary care physicians, specialists, nurses and hospital staff members. Together they communicate, coordinate and integrate medical and psychiatric care that maximizes the benefit to our mutual patients. Then, upon discharge, these patients are integrated into or placed in the proper community services.

Medical surgical hospitals often don't have internal behavioral health services into which patients can be appropriately placed. Because we are able to assist in placing patients into appropriate behavioral health services, ConsultPointe reduces the costs for the hospitals with which we work at a time when Alabama hospitals are struggling financially.

We are excited to partner with acute care hospitals that need us to help them manage the behavioral health needs of their patients. The concept of consultation to acute care hospitals allows us to be responsive to communities everywhere we operate. We hope to establish ConsultPointe in the hospitals within the east central region of Alabama where AltaPointe expanded in 2016. We are eager to show these hospitals the cost-benefit an arrangement with ConsultPointe can bring.

Through ConsultPointe, our medical professionals can help acute care hospitals in many ways. Most important, we can stabilize or place patients in more appropriate levels of care where we can focus on their behavioral health needs often within our continuum of care.



**Tuerk Schlesinger, CEO**

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## On our cover

Opioid addiction is now officially acknowledged as a national health emergency by President Donald Trump. This issue features a physician and therapist answering questions about the epidemic and how an AltaPointe clinic helps treat the addiction. The cover art symbolizes the steps one man took to leave opioid addiction behind him (p. 8).

Cover design by Steven Lutz, Pixallure Design



# Sylacauga Region achieves Joint Commission accreditation

AltaPointe Health Systems Sylacauga Region in east central Alabama marked a major milestone this September when it achieved Joint Commission accreditation one year after the AltaPointe and Cheaha Regional Mental Health Center merger.

Typically accreditation is awarded following a Joint Commission survey, **Sherill Alexander**, director of performance improvement for AltaPointe, said. "Based on the patient volume added following the merger, Joint Commission auditors decided not to conduct an on-site survey and accredited AltaPointe's Sylacauga region based on accreditation in its Mobile Bay region."

However, performance improvement staff conducted an extension survey. "We proceeded as if we were Joint Commission surveyors and took the staff through the entire survey process," Alexander said. "The staff in the Sylacauga region rose to the occasion and performed well."

Following the completion of the survey, Alexander presented the AltaPointe Sylacauga Region staff members with a Joint Commission Accreditation framed certificate.



AltaPointe Sylacauga Region leadership, from left, Brandy Richardson and Ann Cunningham join Cindy Atkinson, far right, as she accepts a framed Joint Commission certificate of Accreditation for their programs. Sherill Alexander, second from right, made the presentation.

"Patient safety and quality of care issues are at the forefront of Joint Commission standards," **Cindy Atkinson**, AltaPointe Associate Executive Director of Community Mental Health for the Sylacauga Region, said. "Achieving accreditation makes a strong statement to those we serve, our staff, and community about our commitment to provide the highest quality services."

AltaPointe voluntarily submits to audits by the Joint Commission, an independent, not-for-profit organization that accredits and certifies nearly 21,000 healthcare organizations and programs in the United States. AltaPointe first became accredited in 2002 and was the first behavioral healthcare organization in Alabama to earn

that designation.

The Joint Commission's standards of care help guide AltaPointe as it provides the best care possible to its patients.

"I am incredibly excited for our Sylacauga region. This is a goal Cindy Atkinson had set with her staff members and was able to achieve," **Tuerk Schlesinger**, AltaPointe CEO, said. "The Joint Commission gold seal demonstrates the staff members are delivering a high quality of care to our patients."

## Ivey names Lynn Beshear Alabama Mental Health Commissioner



Lynn Beshear

Lynn Beshear was appointed commissioner of the Alabama Department of Mental Health by Gov. Kay Ivey this July replacing Jim Perdue, who served two years as an appointee of former Gov. Robert Bentley.

Beshear has said the department will focus on increasing accessibility to mental health services, creating a program to reduce the number of people with mental health issues in jail, creating a program to prevent those in mental health crises from going to jail or ERs, and playing a critical role in the fight against the opioid epidemic among other initiatives.

"Through active participation in securing mental health services in the River Region, Lynn understands the complexities of the Department, and the importance of its work on behalf of the people of Alabama" Gov. Ivey said when she announced Beshear's appointment.

A resident of Montgomery, Beshear was a founding member of Envision 2020, a community-driven strategic planning effort involving citizens and leaders in the Central Alabama counties of Autauga, Elmore, Lowndes, Macon and Montgomery - the River Region. Serving as its only executive director until her appointment as commissioner this summer, Beshear lead the community development group.

She also has served as board member for Montgomery Academy, United Way, First United Methodist Church and others. Beshear currently serves on the board of Joint Public Charity Hospital, Montgomery Metro YMCA, and the Auburn University of Montgomery School of Liberal Arts Advisory Board.

A native of Durham, N.C., she is married to Dr. Bob Beshear, a retired pediatrician. Beshear earned a nursing degree from North Carolina Baptist Hospital School of Nursing and worked as a staff nurse in the Intensive Care Nursery at Duke University Medical Center and named head nurse for the Duke Well-Baby Nursery.



# Bravo!



Lu McCall (left) with NAMI Mobile Probate Court Coordinator, Emilia Gonzalez.

Congratulations **Lucreasia (Lu) McCall** for receiving the Friend of the Court award from Alabama NAMI during this year's state conference held August 24-26 in Montgomery. She received this recognition in honor of her hard work with the Mobile County Probate Court. McCall is a consumer needs specialist with the AltaPointe Bridge Team.

**Charles Mason**, adult residential services' peer specialist, spoke at the National Alliance on Mental Illness Mobile's

June monthly meeting. Mason shared his personal recovery story during the "In Our Own Voice" presentation. By sharing his story, he helps families and others understand what someone with a mental illness diagnosis endures. Mason has been with AltaPointe for five years and serves as an inspiration to others working on their recovery.



J. Clint Moore

**J. Clint Moore, D.O.**, received the clinical instructor of the year award from the USA Department of Physician Assistant Studies, Class of 2017. He was recognized at the annual Convocation Ceremony in July at the University of South Alabama Student Center Ballroom.



**Sandra Parker, M.D.**, as one of the recipients of the 2017 Martha Myers Role Model Award. The award recognizes physician alumni who make great contributions to patient care and the medical profession, and who often go unheralded. These physicians have often served in multiple non-medical leadership roles in the community that notably benefit society. Pictures of the honorees, and their stories, are displayed in the medical student areas of Volker Hall to serve as "role models" for those aspiring physicians.

**Susie Boucher**, assistant director of the AltaPointe Centralized Services Center, recently received her master's in business administration degree from Spring Hill College. Susie joined AltaPointe in 2010 as a children's outpatient services' therapist, and transitioned to a hospital admissions and referral specialist with CarePointe before advancing to centralized services.

Congratulations to **Bennie Hollins, Doris Hopkins, Pamela Johnson, and Jimmye Riggins** on their recent retirements. Hollins was a behavioral aide for adult residential services-Dogwood campus, and was with AltaPointe for 15 years. Hopkins, a health information professional in the Mobile Bay Region, worked with AltaPointe for more than 40 years. Johnson worked at AltaPointe for the past 10 years as a purchasing clerk in finance and accounting. Riggins was a behavioral specialist for outpatient services in the Sylacauga Region and retired after 10 years.



The Five-Star AltaPraise program has spotlighted staff members since 2008, and teams since 2016, for delivering extraordinary customer care across the AltaPointe continuum. From January to

Oct. 1, 2017, staff members, patients, family members and other customers submitted 1,208 AltaPraises recognizing both individual employees and teams for delivering compassionate, accountable, respectful and encouraging care.

Experts say that when it comes to delivering patient care, teamwork is a top driver for patient satisfaction. This year, the four teams receiving AltaPraise recognition include Bay Minette outpatient, Mobile's school-based therapists, adult community services residential housing case managers, and Integrated Healthcare Pharmacy staff members.

*To recognize an individual employee or a team, you may go to [AltaPointe.org](http://AltaPointe.org) to submit an AltaPraise.*



#### Quarterly AltaPraise Team Award

The Integrated Healthcare Pharmacy staff members pose with the AltaPraise Team Award banner for the fourth quarter. Staff includes, from left, Ashley Robinson, Gwen Stringer, Hollie Reed, Pertrina Jackson, Cheree Dewberry, Amy Elder, Julie Bellcase, and Julie Bell.

# Graham says he was ‘born to do this’ job

A calling. A ministry. His life’s work. That’s how **Charles Graham**, AltaPointe’s permanent housing project manager, sees his job.

“It’s like I was born to do this,” Graham said. “It’s like a ministry. I would do it for free. I get high from helping people.”

He is part of the AltaPointe team that serves members of southwest Alabama’s chronically homeless community who suffer from mental illness and other disabilities. On average about 25 people are in the permanent housing program, where they can learn to take care of their physical and mental health needs, including the importance of taking prescribed medications.

Graham said clients in the program also can learn to shop for groceries, study to obtain a GED, acquire social and coping skills, manage their finances and, over time, build trust in the counselors and other staff members who are trying to help them.



Charles Graham checks in with an AltaPointe Permanent Housing resident in Mobile.

## Diverse, transient population needs services

The homeless population is so diverse and transient that serving them is not an easy job. More than a half-million Americans are homeless on any given night, according to the [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development](#). About a third of them are families with children, about nine percent are veterans, *and more than a third of them suffer from severe mental illness or a chronic substance abuse disorder.*

In southwest Alabama, where the [Homeless Coalition of the Gulf Coast](#) conducts an annual “Point in Time” survey in Mobile and Baldwin counties, a total of 606 people were homeless in January 2017. That number included 486 people in the city of Mobile, 80 people in Mobile County and 40 people in Baldwin County.

Under the umbrella of AltaPointe Adult Outpatient Services, Graham and his co-workers begin at the beginning, searching for the homeless wherever they may be camping, whether it’s in the woods, abandoned buildings or parks.

“We have a PATH team – [Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness](#) – with two case workers who are out in the field, going to the places they know they’re likely to encounter homeless people,” he said. “They’ve been working in this field for a long time, so they know where to look.”

When mentally ill homeless people are receptive to the idea of permanent housing, AltaPointe is there to help them.

“Readiness has a lot to do with it,” Graham explains. “We don’t force anything on anyone. A lot of the time, they come to us because they’re finally tired of being on the street. They’re tired of going to shelters. They’re tired of being tired.”

Within 30 days of a homeless person moving into an apartment, Graham has assessed the new resident’s needs and helped him or her set goals that often begin with seeing a therapist and taking medications regularly. The staff takes “a holistic approach,” he said, that includes “being there and encouraging them and saying, ‘You’re going to get better. You really are.’”

[Go to AltaNewsOnline.org to watch Charles Graham’s interview.](#)

## Working to assist the seriously mentally ill homeless population

“Many inaccurate stereotypes exist about seriously mentally ill individuals who also are homeless.

“For example, most would like to work but face enormous barriers to employment. **Think about it:** Are they supposed to walk in with all their belongings, in their usual attire, maybe not having showered, and just fill out an application? Do they even have the necessary IDs and documentation to complete a job application? What address would they provide? And if they are hired, would they have reliable transportation? For those two weeks that they wait for their first paycheck, who would take care of their kids? How would they do laundry?

“There also is a common misperception that a lot of mentally ill homeless people choose to live on the streets.

“Living in shelters or on the streets is difficult and often dangerous for healthy individuals. But for those with a serious mental illness, this kind of life can be overwhelming. They tend to be the most difficult people for society to accept and are often the least able to help themselves or seek treatment.”

– Pam Maumenee

AltaPointe Assistant Director of Adult Community Services

[Go to AltaNewsOnline.org to read the full article.](#)





# EastPointe Hospital celebrates five years

In the five years since its doors opened, **EastPointe Hospital** has helped hundreds of people and their families experiencing mental health crises. AltaPointe Health Systems' adult psychiatric hospital's path to becoming a regional provider of inpatient care reflects a board's and leadership team's vision, the recognition of a community's needs and the unpredictable timing of Searcy Hospital's closing.

In 2008 AltaPointe purchased property in Daphne owned by the Alabama Department of Mental Health for \$4.4 million and invested another \$3.2 million in the extensive renovations, which began in January 2011. Fast forward 18 months and the eagerly anticipated EastPointe Hospital opened in July 2012. By mid-August, AltaPointe CEO **Tuerk Schlesinger** said the 82-bed facility was nearly full.

There had been an adult psychiatric bed shortage in the region for a long time, according to Schlesinger.

"EastPointe was a resource well needed to help meet the inpatient needs of people with severe mental illness who live in this region," Schlesinger said. "Especially with the growth in Baldwin County, there was a major problem with the lack of resources for psychiatric inpatient acute care stay.

"Law enforcement was really ready for EastPointe to open as well," Schlesinger continued. "We have a great probate judge that we've been working with for years and built on that relationship to set up a courtroom at EastPointe."

## Cultivating community relationships

Baldwin County Probate Judge Tim Russell has held court each week at EastPointe since 2012. Russell said it saves time and resources not having to transport patients for hearings to the county seat of Bay Minette. Judge Russell was among the guests to celebrate the opening of EastPointe in July 2012 and remembers



Tuerk Schlesinger, AltaPointe CEO, right, hands a microphone to Jim Reddoch, commissioner of the Alabama Department of Mental Health, during the EastPointe Hospital opening reception July 19, 2012.



it well. He said he was pleasantly surprised to see the old building transformed into something new.

"When I first drove up after not seeing the property for several years I couldn't believe how nice it was," Russell said. "Great credit goes to AltaPointe for taking this facility and revitalizing it. It truly is beautiful. EastPointe does a fabulous job of caring for people."

Schlesinger said, "AltaPointe is pleased that EastPointe has become a community resource. We know the community very much relies on us as a place to go for involuntary and voluntary psychiatric care," he continued.

## EastPointe structure's history

The building that AltaPointe purchased and renovated as EastPointe originally opened in 1986 as a Bradford Healthcare facility. Many years later, the Alabama Department of Mental Health purchased it and operated it as Searcy State Hospital's assessment center known as the Emmett Poundstone Mental Health Facility in the early 90s.

## Filling the gap in psychiatric care

EastPointe opened in July 2012, four months shy of the closing of Searcy Hospital, the state psychiatric hospital that served south Alabama. Schlesinger said AltaPointe began developing programs early on that would provide intensive, community-based services

# rs of helping patients achieve recovery



Today, the EastPointe Hospital main entrance welcomes visitors and stands in stark contrast to its pre-renovation photo circa 2010 (at left).

**“We are glad to have become a resource and know the community very much relies on us for involuntary and voluntary care.”**

– Tuerk Schlesinger

for Searcy patients transitioning from the institutional environment. AltaPointe and EastPointe administrators and managers played a role in the planning.

**Jarrett Crum, MSW**, who was EastPointe Hospital Administrator at its opening, said the hospital helped reduce the warehousing of patients across the state.

“Several patients that came through [EastPointe] had been housed at Searcy for prolonged periods of time,” Crum said. “When EastPointe opened, we were able to admit them and stabilize them, ultimately discharging them to be transitioned down to one of our group homes or returned to their families.”

When at full capacity, EastPointe may employ as many as 225.

## Offering specialized care

EastPointe is one of two AltaPointe free-standing psychiatric hospitals. [BayPointe Hospital](#) is located in Mobile and serves children. Both hospitals offer specialized care devoted to helping patients achieve recovery.

“Free-standing psychiatric hospitals offer personalized care unique to the patient’s needs,” Crum added. “They have a distinct treatment team that includes a psychiatrist, therapist, and a nurse, who work closely with the patient and the facility to reach goals.

Crum went on to comment on BayPointe’s services. “We have recreational therapy, nursing, and clinical therapy staff members available to the patient. We also can pull in additional support such as dietary and speech therapy to make sure we are managing the needs of the patient.”

## Shattering stereotypes

EastPointe Hospital is like no other free-standing psychiatric hospital in Alabama and along the Gulf Coast, according to **Phil Cusa**, EastPointe’s administrator. “Its design helps shatter the stereotype related to how the public might perceive a psychiatric hospital’s appearance.” He said the décor is pleasing to staff members and creates a good working environment.

“It looks like a hospital where you would want to receive care,” Cusa said. “When patients and their families enter the building they are pleased, and say, ‘Wow, this is a beautiful place.’”

Walcott, Adams and Verneuille Architects of Fairhope designed the building to be aesthetically appealing and to ensure safety. Nature plays prominently in the hospital but particularly in the enhanced landscaping, color selections, and artwork. The rustic, pastoral-themed art hanging on the walls creates a calming and engaging environment and helps promote a non-institutional feeling.

“Looking back at EastPointe and seeing where it is today, it seems like it has always been there,” Schlesinger added. “We are



The nurses’ stations are designed for maximum visibility and staff connection with the patients.

proud of it and of our staff members for the exceptional care they provide each day. We are grateful for the community partners in Baldwin County who help make it possible.”

**Go to [AltaNewsOnline.org](#) to watch two videos about psychiatric hospitals.**



# Opioid addiction on the rise, especially in Alabama

Opioid addiction in the U.S. has been rising for years. Physicians prescribed enough opioids in 2015 for every American man, woman, and child to be medicated around the clock for three weeks. The [President's Commission on Combating Drug Addiction and the Opioid Crisis](#) also reported that opioid overdoses now kill more people each year than gun homicides and car crashes combined.

In Alabama, where physicians prescribe more opioids than in any other state, the nearly six million [opioid pain medications](#) prescribed in 2015 amounted to 1.2 prescriptions per each of the state's 4.85 million people, as revealed in an Associated Press and [Center for Public Integrity investigation](#).

In the Mobile Bay region, AltaPointe has helped people transition from opiate addiction to recovery through its [methadone](#) clinic since the 1970s. Today, more than 1,200 individuals receive treatment through [AltaPointe Substance Abuse Services](#); 400 of them are enrolled in the medication-assisted treatment (MAT) program that prescribes methadone.

**Marianne Saitz, O.D.**, medication-assisted treatment medical director, and **Halie Jones, LPC-S, M.S.**, substance abuse services assistant director, work together to determine when individuals seeking help are a right fit for the AltaPointe MAT clinic and whether the clinic is right for them.

## Medication-assisted treatment clinic fights opioid addiction crisis

### Over prescribing causes opioid addiction



Dr. Marianne Saitz meets with methadone clinic consumers each week.

### What do you believe has caused the widespread increase in opioid addiction and overdoses?

**Saitz:** The over prescribing of opiates is the primary problem. Opioid pain killers simply are not necessary for some procedures. You don't necessarily need Lortab when you have a tooth pulled. Tylenol should suffice.

### What drugs do AltaPointe consumers abuse the most?

**Saitz:** AltaPointe providers say [Lortab, now known as Norco](#), is the most abused drug.

### How is prescribing opioids related to addiction?

**Saitz:** The majority of addictions begin with a prescription from a doctor. When an individual takes the opioid because of the euphoric feeling they get, they often can tell they're getting into trouble. However, they don't talk to their doctor about this because they know the doctor will cut off their prescription. When this happens, the patient is not referred to substance use treatment or weaned off the medication. They are physically addicted to pain killers and need medical help to get off the drug.

### How much time does it take to become addicted?

**Saitz:** Sometimes it takes less than the 30-day prescription.

### When can a physician tell that patients are in trouble with opiates?

**Saitz:** There is a change in the patient's behavior. They request early refills using excuses such as they lost the bottle. Another way they find out is when a patient visits the ER and gets another opioid prescription. The ER is required to report the prescription to the [Alabama Prescription Drug Monitoring Program](#), a registry of all controlled substances prescribed in the state.

### What is happening in the brain that makes someone susceptible to addiction?

**Saitz:** Opioid use can change brain chemistry. The body reports to the brain that it is gaining pleasure from the opiate, which reinforces the need to take the medication. When someone addicted to opioids stops taking the drug, for weeks they are very sick and feel like they have the worst-ever case of flu. Taking more opiates to feed the brain's need for the drug is what gets them out of bed every day. It is impossible to get off opioids without treatment.

### Why is MAT the best option?

**Saitz:** Replacing the illicit opiate with medications such as [methadone](#) or Suboxone will control withdrawals and cravings. People do not get high from these medications. They help keep them from not being sick and keep them in and out of constant withdrawals. Seeing the patients every day for the first 90 days also is part of the reason why MAT is so effective. It allows them to feel normal and to be able to function. They are no longer sick and no longer chasing the high. They are able to repair damaged relationships and are able to hold down jobs that they were not able to do when they are using.

### Does AltaPointe offer Suboxone?

**Saitz:** Not at the moment. AltaPointe would like to add a Suboxone clinic to our substance use services. This would greatly improve medication treatment for individuals for whom methadone is not an option.

### Does AltaPointe see many individuals who use heroin?

**Saitz:** Occasionally, we see some heroin use from the Gulf Shores area; some from New Orleans. Most clients now prefer legitimate



prescriptions such as [Norco and Oxycontin](#). A 10 mg Norco pill goes for \$4 to \$6 on the street. Some addicts need to take 10 pills three to four times a day. Compared to the prescription drugs, street heroin is low quality and doesn't work for them.

### **What advice would you give to help an addict?**

**Saitz:** When you suspect someone of having an opioid addiction, it is always best to not accuse them. Say that you're very concerned, that you've noticed changes in behavior or in their personality and that you're worried they may have a problem. It is a treatable disease. It would make it easier for someone that seeks help to have a friend or loved one accompany them to treatment the first time they go. You would merely drive them to the location, sit in the waiting room; just provide support.

### **When is it acceptable to call your loved one's doctor about his or her addiction?**

**Saitz:** When you think someone has gotten to the point that they're doctor shopping or getting drugs their doctor doesn't know about, it quickly can become a matter of life or death. That's when you should call their doctor and say, "You're prescribing 'x' medication for my son or daughter, and they're also doing this or that." It is not a [HIPAA](#) violation and frequently doctors have no idea their patient is mixing prescribed meds with other things.

### **What should the public know to prevent addiction or identify someone who has an opioid addiction?**

**Saitz:** The public needs to know this disease creates a difference in brain chemistry. If you need help or someone you know needs help, your primary care physician can link you to services. The Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration ([SAMHSA](#)) website lists treatment centers by geographic region.

### **Is there one primary barrier to treatment?**

**Saitz:** People with jobs are afraid of being fired if their employer learns they have an addiction. That happens because most employers don't view addiction as a disease.

## **Jones believes addiction affects everyone**



Halie Jones, left, and Christe Damico, MAT team leader, discuss the AltaPointe Medication-Assisted Treatment program.

### **What population is most prone to become addicted?**

**Jones:** Everybody knows someone with this disease. Statistically, AltaPointe admits more white males with opioid use disorder, although studies show that women are more prone biologically to opioid addiction.

### **According to SAMHSA, opioid addiction often begins in doctors' offices and hospitals, not on street corners.**

### **Where do you believe the opioid addiction crisis began?**

**Jones:** Many consumers we see have been prescribed opioids by doctors. They come to us because they can't stop using on their own. Lots of people have chronic pain and need some type of pain reliever every day. There is no shame in becoming addicted this way. We believe there is treatment, hope and recovery.

### **What are opioid addicts facing when they seek help?**

**Jones:** When consumers come to us they are in crisis, despair. They are trying to find a solution to not feeling like the scum of the earth. Everyone is putting them down. They may just be trying to live minute by minute without hurting and not feeling like death warmed over.

### **What motivates most consumers that come for help?**

**Jones:** Many have criminal charges against them for either distribution or illegal possession of prescription drugs. In Baldwin County, a great percentage of our consumers are referred from the drug court. Their criminal charges can be removed from their records if they go through our program.

### **What should a new MAT consumer expect?**

**Jones:** It is vital for new consumers not to be going through withdrawals, feeling high or committing illegal acts. The first step is to stabilize them. They can expect random drug screens. Also, MAT uses individual and group therapy. If a consumer is depressed and isolates himself or herself, we know this may be a sign they are about to start using again. Then, we may suggest group therapy where we encourage them to set new goals.

### **Are families included in addiction treatment?**

**Jones:** Addiction affects families in a big way. When we work with a family, we can make them understand their loved one is not choosing addiction; they are trying to get well, and, every single time they say they are going to quit, they meant it.

### **How does mental illness affect addiction and treatment?**

**Jones:** Everyone that comes to us for substance use disorder also has an underlying mental health issue such as depression, anxiety or a severe mental illness. Once the substance use is being addressed, the therapist can look at the extent to which mental health issues may have contributed.

### **Does "relapse" mean treatment has failed?**

**Jones:** It's common for people trying to be free from addiction, to have moments where they just want a break from going after their goal. For people striving to stay sober, relapsing doesn't mean they won't get sober. Relapsing is not something scary. It is not the worst thing that can ever happen. The worst thing is relapsing and not trying again to get sober.

Go to [AltaNewsOnline.org](#) to hear Saitz and Jones talk about opioid addiction.



# One man's journey — **opioid addiction** to *peace*

**A lean, low-key and casually dressed man, age 45, walked in, sat down and folded his hands on the conference table in the therapist's office. We shall call him Jack. He preferred not to be identified since he had agreed to talk about his opioid addiction. Although nervous, he spoke easily sharing many personal details.**

## **Jack's story**

Jack bought his drugs on the street and had misused one substance or another for nearly 25 years. He and his pregnant wife were living in a tent behind a Walmart.

As with many people who start down the road to addiction, Jack started smoking pot at 14. At 15, he went to the ER for what turned out to be an ulcer. He was prescribed Demerol for pain. "I branched out to other drugs from there," he said.

"There is a fine line between self-medicating and addiction, and you know when you cross that line."

Jack said doing drugs is a shell game. "When I was using, each day was a blur. Every morning I knew I had to get my fix. I would wake up, drink coffee, scheme and hustle to get money. I spent all my time looking for drugs.

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**'You steal 'cause you have to or you couldn't buy the pills. 'Ain't no glamour in it; nothing but hard knocks.**

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"I was running all day to find what I needed. You steal 'cause you have to or you couldn't buy the pills that sometimes are \$80 to \$90 each. Ain't no glamour in it; nothing but hard knocks."

Then there is the isolation. "I am estranged from most of my family with the exception of my brother whom I help care for.

Some family members still speak, you know, saying, 'Glad to see you.' But there are no invites to their homes, and I don't blame them; I've done them all wrong in some way."

At 25, Jack went to prison for the first time for stealing and spent 1.5 years there. At 32, he was back in prison, this time for two years.

## **Turning to medication-assisted treatment**

One day, at age 39, he had "had a belly full" and decided to get help. "I found AltaPointe in the phone book and called. It was reasonably priced, and I liked everyone I talked to on the phone."

Jack stopped misusing substances six years ago when he enrolled in the AltaPointe MAT program. There he began receiving daily doses of methadone and seeing an MAT therapist.

"Within two months of starting this program, my family and I had a place to live; my baby was born with a home," Jack said. "The methadone clinic has given me my life back. Now I have a life raising a child and want to give her a good childhood."

Jack has advice for anyone with an opioid addiction. "At least try this program. You have to make some exchanges. Who you're going to call your friend; what you're putting in your body. You need to keep yourself straight and stable; you have to work." Getting off drugs was gradual, Jack said. "I got better day by day; was able to hold on to a little money to get a place to live. Now, I can get by, everybody gets fed, everybody goes to bed on time, gets their baths. This is the closest thing I have ever had to a normal life."

Now Jack's usual day begins at 5 a.m. He has coffee, watches the news, dresses and wakes his daughter to be at the bus stop by 7 a.m. After that, he goes to AltaPointe MAT to get his dose.

"I've put a lot of work into myself as a human being and try to see things from the other point of view," he said. "It gives me a little peace, and that's important."

**[Go to AltaNewsOnline.org](http://AltaNewsOnline.org) to listen to Jack tell his story.**



## People & Positions



Chris Murphree

the University of Southern Mississippi. Murphree completed a doctorate in clinical psychology at Argosy University in Atlanta. He completed his pre-doctoral internship at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences-Child Study Center in Little Rock.

**Chris Murphree, Psy.D.**, has joined AltaPointe as a licensed psychologist. He holds a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree in counseling psychology from



Ramnarine Boodoo

of the West Indies, Trinidad and Tobago, and completed his residency in general psychiatry at the State University of New York-Buffalo. Boodoo completed a fellowship in child and adolescent psychiatry at the University of New Mexico where he served as chief fellow. He is board certified in both general and child and adolescent psychiatry from the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology. Boodoo also is an assistant professor of psychiatry at the University of South Alabama-College of Medicine.

**Ramnarine Boodoo, M.D.**, has joined AltaPointe as a psychiatrist at BayView Professional Associates-Mobile. He received his medical degree from the University



Traci Morrow

labor and delivery. She earned her Family Nurse Practitioner (FNP) degree from the University of Alabama in Birmingham-School of Nursing. Morrow served 14 years at the Alabama Institute for the Deaf and Blind as its director of nursing and

**Traci Morrow, FNP, PMHNP**, has joined AltaPointe to work in the Sylacauga Region. A graduate of Auburn University School of Nursing, Morrow's background is emergency medicine, and

FNP. She also worked in inpatient geriatric psychiatry. Morrow earned a second master's at UAB as a psychiatric mental health nurse practitioner (PMHNP). She is dually certified through the American Nursing Credentialing Center as an FNP and PMHNP.



Keri Barr

Hattiesburg. She received the Master of Science in Nursing Award from the USM College of Nursing. Barr is a board certified Family Mental Health Nurse Practitioner through the American Nurses Credentialing Center. She also worked as a psychiatric nurse at East Mississippi State Hospital in Meridian.

**Keri Barr, CRNP**, has joined AltaPointe working in adult outpatient services. Barr earned both bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Southern Mississippi-



April Douglas

in television news working as an anchor for stations in Florida and Alabama. She has been recognized by the Associated Press, National Press Photographers Association, Public Relations Council of Alabama, Southern Public Relations Federation, and the Alabama Hospital Association for her work. Douglas earned a bachelor's degree in mass communications from the University of Montevallo.

**April Douglas** is now the director of public relations. Douglas joined AltaPointe in 2012 as public relations coordinator. Before coming to AltaPointe she spent more than a decade

**Nicolette Harvey, LICSW**, is now the assistant director of BayPointe Hospital. Harvey joined AltaPointe in 2014 as hospital coordinator and most recently served as coordinator of substance abuse services. Harvey and her family relocated from New Orleans where she served as clinical director for two residential treatment facilities. She earned a bachelor's

in social work from Auburn University and a master's in social work from Florida State University. Harvey is a Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker (LICSW) in the state of Alabama.

**Cecily Utsey** is now practice manager of adult residential services and Zeigler outpatient. She previously worked as an accounting specialist. Utsey recently graduated from Ohio University with her master's degree in business administration specializing in healthcare.

**Caitlyn Macon** is now financial analyst in the finance and accounting office where she previously worked as practice manager of adult residential and children's outpatient services. Macon earned her bachelor's degree in business management with a focus in healthcare management from the University of Alabama.

**Anitra Jarreau, RN**, is now a performance improvement coordinator overseeing the nurse delegation program, employee health services and PI nurses for the Mobile Bay and Sylacauga regions. Jarreau most recently oversaw the nurse delegation program. She also has been a behavioral specialist and assistant coordinator, program nurse and residential manager of the transitional age group homes.

**Courtney Washington, MBA, MS**, is now human resources coordinator and will oversee leave administration, workers compensation, as well as benefits. She received her master's degree from Troy University.

## Think about this...

We see our customers as invited guests to a party, and we are the hosts. It's our job every day to make every important aspect of the customer experience a little bit better.

— Jeff Bezos  
CEO Amazon.com

## AltaPointe proves its value as a community partner

AltaPointe staff members demonstrate the importance of giving back to the communities they serve. From Sylacauga to South Mobile, therapists, mental health first aid trainers, peer specialists and administrators participated in events geared to raise awareness about mental health.

### Media mentions

**John Conrad**, assistant director of BayView Professional Associates, joined Mary Booth and Uncle Henry on Mix 99.9 radio to talk about suicide prevention ahead of the "Out of the Darkness Walk." **Marianne Saitz, D.O.**, was featured on FOX 10 News raising awareness about the opioid epidemic.

AltaPointe participated in Mental Health First Aid USA's monthly #BeTheDifference Twitter chat with other behavioral healthcare providers. The chat focused on mental health at school. MHFA USA recognized AltaPointe's contributions.

AltaPointe's Facebook and Twitter pages reach thousands of people, people searching for employment, help for themselves or loved ones experiencing a mental health issue, and even law enforcement looking for resources. One comment came from the Gulf Shores Police Department that read, "Glad I saw your post...made me think of reaching out!"



John Conrad, assistant director of BayView Professional Associates, second from left, joined, from left, Mary Booth of Mix 99.9, Lydia Barber with the Out of Darkness Walk, and radio personality Uncle Henry, to promote suicide prevention on Gulf Coast radio stations.

Become a fan of AltaPointe on Facebook, and follow us on Twitter to join the conversations.

### Mental Health First Aid to mental wellness

Law enforcement agencies from across Alabama turned to AltaPointe for Mental Health First Aid training. **Tamieka Martin, Mark Miele, Eddie Pratt, and Debra Campbell** trained police officers, sheriff's deputies, and probation officers in the skills necessary to respond to a mental health crisis.

AltaPointe was well represented during a REAL Talk Mental Wellness Series. **Jarrett Crum**, BayPointe Hospital administrator, served on a panel, as did **Hannah Mansfield**, peer specialist, who spoke about living with depression. During one panel discussion, Mobile County Juvenile Court Judge Edmond Naman, called AltaPointe a "valuable community resource." **Jameron "Deon" Gatson**, children's outpatient services coordinator, spoke during the same wellness series about the importance of understanding teenage behaviors.

**Ingrid Hartman**, CarePointe assistant director, served on a mental wellness panel during the first-ever Women's Focus Conference at the Mobile Convention Center.

### Back-to-school health matters

The AltaPointe Community Counseling Center of South Mobile staff members teamed up with Bayou Clinic for *Bayou on the Move for Kids* to make sure area children were prepared to go back to school. Staff members handed out mental health fact sheets and school supplies to dozens of families. "It was a great opportunity to spread awareness about our services," **Brittany Rice**, AltaPointe South Mobile coordinator, said.

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## AltaNewsOnline.org momentum grows

Do you want more AltaNews? Join the crowd and head over to AltaNewsOnline, AltaPointe's online newsletter. It offers readers videos that complement features in the printed version and stories exclusive to the digital format.

The fall 2017 online edition covers the opening of EastPointe Hospital in 2012 with interviews from Baldwin County Probate Judge Tim Russell, extended coverage of the opioid crisis with interviews of an AltaPointe consumer and substance abuse services staff members, and a look at technology added to BayPointe Hospital's day treatment program.



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## CarePointe<sup>SM</sup> CORNER

### June – August 2017

CarePointe answered an average of 6,560 calls during business hours.

CarePointe facilitated/assisted more than 750 after-hours crisis calls.

CarePointe coordinated, addressed or assisted with nearly 540 inpatient referrals or transfers from local and state hospitals.