

2414 Bull Street/P.O. Box 485, Columbia, SC 29202

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Contact: SCDMH Office of Public Affairs
Phone: (803) 898-8581
E-mail: mark.binkley@scdmh.org

Mental Health Appoints New Deputy Director of Community Mental Health Services

Columbia, SC – The South Carolina Department of Mental Health (SCDMH) has selected Deborah Shogry Blalock as its Deputy Director over the Division of Community Mental Health Services, effective February 17, 2018. Blalock will replace Geoffrey Mason, MPA, who recently announced his retirement; he has served as the Agency’s Deputy Director for Community Mental Health Services since 2004, and has been with the Department of Mental Health for 24 years.

Blalock is a licensed professional counselor supervisor and a certified public manager. After receiving her MEd in Clinical Counseling from the Citadel in 1993, Blalock began her career as a mental health counselor at the Department’s Charleston-Dorchester Mental Health Center (CDMHC). Following a series of promotions, she was named the executive director of the Center in August of 2004.

The CDMHC is one of the largest of the SCDMH’s community mental health centers. Under the leadership of Blalock, it has been repeatedly recognized for its innovative programs and services, including:

- The creation of a mobile mental health clinic in a Recreational Vehicle, dubbed the *Highway to Hope*, to bring mental health services to rural parts of Charleston County;
- Partnering with local law enforcement agencies to embed clinical staff with law enforcement when they respond to calls involving domestic violence; and
- In partnership with local hospitals and other agencies, recently opening a 10-bed Crisis Stabilization center to provide an appropriate alternative to a hospital emergency room for persons experiencing a mental health crisis.

Earlier this month, the Center received the prestigious Leaders Innovating Telehealth Award, honoring a unique pilot program, which uses telehealth technology to enable Charleston EMS staff to connect with a CDMHC counselor remotely. When responding to a 911 emergency involving a mental health issue, EMTs are able arrange an assessment of the patient by a counselor using a secure mobile tablet. With the advantage of an on-site mental health assessment, EMS staff are able to identify individuals whose treatment needs can be addressed safely in a non-hospital setting, helping divert a significant number of patients in psychiatric distress from a trip to a hospital emergency room. The result is faster, more appropriate care for the patient, as well as the avoidance of unnecessary and costly emergency department care.

In her new position, Blalock will oversee the Department’s statewide network of 17 community mental health centers and clinics, as well as a number of Agency programs aimed at assisting specific populations in their recovery from mental illness, including Housing and Homeless Services, Employment Services, School-based Mental Health Services, Deaf Services, and Crisis Stabilization Services. She will join the agency’s executive leadership team, led by State Director John H. Magill, which, in addition to the community mental health centers, also oversees the operation of three psychiatric hospitals, a hospital for the treatment of substance use disorders, a large telepsychiatry program, a community nursing home, and three State veterans’ nursing homes.

According to Magill, “Blalock will be a valuable asset to the leadership team and will bring an exciting and innovative approach to the delivery of the Department’s community mental health services.”

The [South Carolina Department of Mental Health’s](#) mission is to support the recovery of people with mental illnesses, giving priority to adults with serious and persistent mental illness and to children and adolescents with serious emotional disturbances. The Agency serves approximately 100,000 citizens with mental illnesses, approximately 30,000 of whom are children and adolescents.