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**‘GOVERNOR’S COMMENDATION’ AWARDED TO BILL WILLIS CMHC**

Bill Willis Community Mental Health and Substance Abuse Center in Tahlequah has been honored with a “Governor’s Commendation” for its establishment of an after-hours crisis evaluation and assessment unit serving individuals in Wagoner, Adair, Cherokee and Sequoyah counties, said Bill Willis CMHC Executive Director Connie Schlittler.

The project, designed to better manage state funds for psychiatric inpatient services, was recognized May 6 at “Quality Oklahoma Team Day 2004,” an event held annually at the state capitol to honor state agencies that develop money-saving projects.

This is the second consecutive year Bill Willis CMHC has been honored with a Governor’s Commendation, which is presented to projects that display results, innovation and use quality-management techniques resulting in taxpayer savings.

Bill Willis CMHC employees recognized for their involvement in the program were Dr. Penelope Skoglund, Brian Childs, Kenneth Johnson, Lisa Blanco and Lance Dickison.

With budget constraints a constant issue nowadays, the Bill Willis CMHC project was designed to reduce costs associated with psychiatric inpatient stays. Since its inception in July of 2003, the program has resulted in a 30 percent decrease in inpatient

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hospitalization, with a savings of approximately \$250,000-\$300,000.

The program also has reduced inpatient days by 33 percent, reduced unnecessary use of local hospital emergency rooms for psychiatric inpatient screenings, and diverted consumers to more appropriate levels of care, whether they need substance abuse treatment or detox, emergency shelter, domestic violence services or outpatient services.

Bill Willis CMHC, a facility of the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, is based in Tahlequah, with satellite facilities in Sallisaw, Stilwell and Wagoner.

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