

Need for mental health clinic growing; budget may increase

By TOM BETZ

The Goodland Star-News GOODLAND — Sherman County commissioners talked about increasing the budget for the regional High Plains Mental Health Center after hearing an update on operations at their meeting last Tuesday.

The commissioners discussed the budget for mental health after the presentation, and agreed to try to raise it from \$30,000 to \$40,000 next year. The money comes from the special health services sales tax.

Walt Hill, executive director of the regional agency, which serves all of northwest Kansas, told the commissioners the organization handled about 5,000 clients last year. Sherman County saw a jump of about 8 percent in cases, from 269 to 310 in the year.

Accompanying Hill were Mary Pat Bowman, executive director of Golden West Community Center

and president of the High Plains advisory board, and Tracy Hillmer, director of the Goodland clinic.

Hill said with the cuts in state budget, the agency has been increasing fees. Last year, fees made up 49 percent (\$3.8 million) of total income and state aid had fallen to 7 percent (\$556,426). The counties provide another 7 percent (\$556,184) and the federal government provides 31 percent (\$2.4 million) through the Mental Health Reform programs.

He said the county shared has remained pretty constant, with a slight increase over the past three years. Hill asked that the commissioners maintain their contribution in next year's budget.

To give them an idea of where they fit in the 20-county region, Hill handed out a breakdown of the budget by county and by population. Sherman County ranked near the bottom, below other counties of

similar size. The state average per person is \$7.86 while the High Plains area averages \$5, he said.

Hill said because of state cuts, the mental health board was asking Ellis and Trego counties to restore their contributions to the level they had in 1999.

A chart Hill handed out shows that Sherman County taxpayers pay about 8 percent of the total cost for handling clients in the county. Sherman County handles about 7.5 percent of the total regional caseload. Hill said the client fees are helping, but it is important to keep the county money to keep door open.

He said the organization has been using teleconferences to reduce travel costs, and they have a new "respite center" in Hays.

He said about 25 percent of the clients are children, but there is a growing number of older clients because of the retirement age and he

sees this as a growth area. He said they expect to see a shift of population, especially along I-70, with an increase in the older population.

Bowman and Hillmer said the Goodland clinic can provide critical incident debriefing, and that this

is a free service to emergency, law enforcement people and schools. Hillmer said she has been training for this service.

Commissioners Mitch Tiede and Kevin Rasure told Hill they had not heard any complaints about the ser-

vice at the Goodland clinic, and that it was good to see it well staffed.

Later, the commissioners agreed they could try to increase the budget from \$30,000 to \$40,000 next year. That will be part of the budget discussions in July and August.

Presumption of Death new mystery at library

From "LINK," Page 3

The *Amateur Marriage* shows how abruptly even the most boring life can go wrong. As usual, Tyler provides enough humor to keep the reader going through what at times seems overwhelming. It makes for a good summer read.

Finally, if you want a little mystery in your life, try reading *Presumption of Death* by Perri O'Shaughnessy, described as a stylish California thriller. The plot centers around attorney Nina Reilly, on leave from her Lake Tahoe practice and on a romantic getaway with her

boyfriend. Since nothing ever stays calm and relaxing for Nina, it comes as no surprise that this retreat turns into an investigation she simply cannot pass up. The son of an old friend is accused of arson and murder at the hunt begins. Nina believes in his innocence even if his alibi is a bit shaky and all the evidence does point to him.

Presumption of Death is the author's eighth novel starring Nina Reilly and sort of demands to be read in one sitting.

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