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People

For Spears, image change could come from within

Singer returns to rehab

By Donna Freydkin
USA TODAY

Britney Spears is officially in rehab. But will it get her back on track?

The troubled singer and mother of two checked herself into a facility Tuesday, Spears' manager, Larry Rudolph, confirmed. "Britney Spears has voluntarily checked herself into an undisclosed rehab facility today. We ask that the media respect her privacy as well as those of her family and friends at this time," he said in a statement.

Several photo agencies snapped shots of the 25-year-old singer at Promises in Malibu, Calif. It's Spears' second brush with treatment in the past week, after a stop-over at a facility in Antigua.

Once a pop princess, Spears has been making headlines recently, most notably by shaving her head herself at a salon in the San Fernando Valley Friday night. On Sunday night, she was spotted out in Hollywood in a blond wig.

Experts wonder whether her move to enter rehab was truly an effort to help herself — or to rehabilitate her tarnished image.

"It is a crisis-management tool," says Terence McPhaul, a counselor and author of *The Celebrity Psyche*.

Entering some kind of facility has

become a familiar path for stars lately. Country star Keith Urban just wrapped up a three-month stay for substance abuse. And *Grey's Anatomy's* Isaiah Washington sought help after repeating a homophobic slur.

In January, Lindsay Lohan, who was spotted with Spears in Los Angeles in November, checked into Wonderland Center in Los Angeles' Laurel Canyon. Though the duration of Lohan's program is unclear, the 20-year-old actress was spotted at Les Deux and Area clubs in L.A. in early February, and on Monday, she was photographed leaving the Hollywood hot spot Winston's.

Spears and Lohan are both child stars who may have never learned to cope with adult problems.

Spears, McPhaul says, "has been working for a very long time, and there are steps in her development she has skipped over."

Michael Cartwright, CEO of Malibu's The Canyon at Peace Park, where the average stay is 60 days, hopes Spears is in for the long haul and not in an outpatient or short-term facility, like Lohan was. "We're seeing that if people don't stay for 60 to 90 days in treatment, there's a higher likelihood they're going to relapse," he says.

Spears has kept gossip columnists busy since November, when



Reuters

Spears: Entered facility on Tuesday.

she filed for divorce from Kevin Federline. The two share custody of sons Sean Preston, 1, and Jayden James, 5 months, and rehab could influence the custody battle. Rehab, says Joshua Forman, an attorney and matrimonial/family law expert, is "a good thing because it shows that a person is trying to get over whatever demons they have. It's a bad thing because it shows they have a problem."

Neither Spears' nor Federline's camps would say who is caring for the children. Forman says: "Most likely, they're with the mother and

the nanny, but where's Kevin? This could cause a huge problem for her if he goes to court and says, 'I want my kids.'"

Rehab could prove beneficial for Spears professionally. She has been intermittently recording a new album, and to get her career back on track, says *Vibe* music editor Jon Caramanica, Spears needs to speak to her fans through her music.

"There's a significant demographic that would be interested in some more insightful music," he says. "If she comes out stronger, smarter and self-aware and makes something of it, that could be a winner."

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