

Activists protest changes set for Bethany Hospital

By Mickey Ciokajlo
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Community activists gathered in front of Advocate Bethany Hospital on Chicago's West Side Monday to protest plans to convert the facility into one that treats long-term patients with acute illnesses.

Ministers and residents said the plan, which would close the emergency room, the obstetrics ward and make other service cuts, comes at the expense of neighborhood residents who would be forced to travel to other hospitals.

But a spokesman for Advocate Health Care, which owns the hospital, 3435 W. Van Buren St., said the decision to switch to long-term acute care was made after a careful analysis of how best to serve the community.

Tony Mitchell, vice president of communications and government relations, said Advocate is committed to serving the West Side, and no other hospital there offers long-term acute care.

"We believe that we are, in turning into a long-term acute-care hospital, going to be providing a service that doesn't exist in that community," Mitchell said. "We're meeting a need for those patients."

Mitchell said the emergency room, which is underused, will go on stand-by status with a nurse and an on-call physician.

Licensed for 125 beds, Bethany Hospital has an average daily census of 73, a load Mitchell said can be readily absorbed by nearby hospitals. The hospital as a long-term care facility would have 85 beds, Mitchell said.

"We see this as a way to have more of an impact in the community," Mitchell said. "It was just not being fully utilized as an acute-care hospital."

Rev. Gregory Seal Livingston of the Mandell United Methodist Church, 5000 W. Congress Pkwy., called on Advocate to improve Bethany as a full-service hospital.

West Sider Monique Moore, 38, said the emergency room is sorely needed and the service changes would have the "worst kind of impact for a community that is already struggling."

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