



Advocate slashing services at West Side hospital

By Brett Chase
Jan. 11, 2006

(Crain's) — Advocate Health Care is shutting down its emergency room, birthing center and other services at its money-losing Bethany Hospital on Chicago's West Side, a move made amid union criticism that the health-care chain neglects poor neighborhoods.

Bethany would close its emergency room next month and phase out other services over the next few months under a plan that needs to be approved by state officials, said Tony Mitchell, Advocate's vice-president of communications and government relations.

By March, the 125-bed hospital would become a long-term specialty facility serving patients recuperating for an average of 25 days. The hospital would also shut its detox, intensive care and psychiatry programs, reducing total number of beds to 85.

The Service Employees International Union is waging a campaign against Advocate, the Chicago area's largest hospital system, charging the chain doesn't provide charitable care and serves affluent suburbs ahead of inner-city neighborhoods.



Bethany Hospital

The union has criticized Advocate for seeking a \$239 million hospital expansion in Park Ridge and has claimed it fails to invest in Chicago locations. Advocate officials say they invest in all their facilities across the system.

Responding to union criticism, Mr. Mitchell defended Advocate's record of serving low-income areas at a November meeting of the Illinois Health Facilities Planning Board, a state panel that approves building projects. Mr. Mitchell told the panel that Advocate was committed to continuing service at Bethany, transcripts from the meeting show.

In an interview Wednesday night, Mr. Mitchell said the hospital system is committed to the West Side community and asserted that the long-term care hospital will provide a niche service not currently available around the East Garfield Park neighborhood where Bethany is located.

Mr. Mitchell said there are a number of large and small hospitals on the West Side, including Rush University Medical Center, Mount Sinai Hospital and John H. Stroger Jr. Hospital of Cook County that can serve patients who live near Bethany.

The decision to scale back services was an economic one. Bethany is projected to lose more than \$20 million this year and probably will lose more money over the next three years, Mr. Mitchell said.

"Part of what we want to do is figure out a way to sustain our commitment to the community and, at the same time, have an operation that is sustainable," Mr. Mitchell said.

Glenn Poshard, who heads the state's Health Facilities Planning Board, couldn't be reached for comment Wednesday night. A spokeswoman for the Illinois Department of Public Health said the hospital would need board approval to discontinue programs such as obstetrics or mental illness services.

Mr. Mitchell declined to say whether Advocate has contacted board officials or when the plan would be presented to the panel.
