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Advocate planning to end some West Side services

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BY [FRANCINE KNOWLES](#) Business Reporter

Advocate Health Care said it will shut its intensive-care unit, birthing center and other operations at Bethany Hospital and create a long-term acute-care hospital there, part of plans that drew criticism from a labor-backed health care advocacy group Thursday.

The upcoming changes include making Bethany's emergency room a standby operation.

The plan was blasted by the Service Employees International Union's Hospital Accountability Project, which has criticized Advocate's level of investment in minority communities. The changes will leave poor residents on the West Side with fewer health care options, said Director Joseph Geevarghese.

But Advocate representatives said Bethany, 3435 W. Van Buren, will be offering services that hadn't been available in the community. Bethany, which is licensed as a 125-bed facility, will convert to an 85-bed long-term acute-care hospital that will treat patients who require extended medical care for an average of 25 days, said Advocate spokesman Tony Mitchell. The hospital will focus on serving patients with complex medical conditions, including heart disease, cancer, respiratory conditions, stroke, kidney disease and severe wounds, he said.

"This will be the first and only long-term acute-care hospital on the West Side," Mitchell said.

Advocate expects to begin accepting long-term-care patients around March 1.

The hospital will continue to offer outpatient services, including mammography and other diagnostic testing. But Bethany's emergency room will no longer be full service, and the hospital will discontinue its detox and psychiatry programs. The changes will be phased in starting next month, Mitchell said.

Geevarghese contended the changes are rooted in financial concerns and designed to land Advocate more lucrative reimbursement dollars from Medicaid. Bethany has been a money-losing venture for Advocate. The hospital lost about \$17 million last year and is projected to lose \$20 million this year, Mitchell said.

"It's fundamentally about the bottom line," of Advocate, Geevarghese said. "The bottom line impact for the 67,000 patients that go to Bethany annually is they're left with less access to health care on the West Side, and the lines at Cook County are going to grow longer and people will get less and less quality health care.

Mitchell contended Advocate's acute-care facility will enhance care in the community.

"Bethany is in a district where there are more hospital beds than any place in the state, and there is a lot of duplication of services," he said. "What we were trying to do was to figure out a way that we could remain in the West Side community because we'd made a commitment to staying there, but to figure out a way that we could deliver health care that was going to have more of an impact on the community."

Advocate said it will establish the Bethany Community Health Fund to support community-based efforts to address health disparities.

It plans to soon take its proposal to discontinue the affected Bethany operations to the Illinois Health Facilities Planning Board. Before shutting any medical, surgical, pediatric or mental illness services, hospitals need approval from the Illinois Health Facilities Planning Board.

Advocate won approval from the board to build a \$239 million hospital in Park Ridge. But the board asked Advocate to provide information on its investments and plans for its Chicago hospitals.

SEIU and community groups have accused Advocate of spending fewer dollars on improvements in minority communities. Advocate has denied that that's the case.

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