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## Hospital plans worry Hazel Crest

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**By Clare Walters, The Star**

Hazel Crest officials soon will be sending a letter of concern to top administrators at Advocate Health Care, owner of South Suburban Hospital.

Mayor Bill Browne and the village board Tuesday decided to author a letter containing their questions and concerns about Advocate's plans for South Suburban, which is in Hazel Crest.

Specifically, village officials are concerned about Advocate's desire to boost its presence in the growing southwest suburban market and to enact a regionalization plan.

Village officials received a list of bulleted talking points from hospital personnel last month.

According to the list, Advocate's plans for this year could include a name change for South Suburban to Christ Hospital South, as Christ Medical Center in Oak Lawn — also owned by Advocate — has greater brand recognition in the South Suburbs.

Hazel Crest officials say a name change would alienate their community and surrounding communities.

"We identify with this hospital, not Christ," Trustee Melvyn Freed said.

But Mike Maggio, an Advocate spokesman, said claims of a name change are untrue.

"There's no foundation to that," he said. "Nothing is being changed from what it is currently. Christ Medical Center will always be Christ Medical Center and South Suburban will always be South Suburban."

Advocate's plans for this year, Maggio said, do include the integration of medical staffs in its south and southwest regions.

Maggio said integration of staffs means fostering cooperation among them, not merging them. Advocate wants to create opportunities for medical staffers to work together as a way to enhance the strengths of Advocate institutions.

"It's nothing radical," Maggio said.

Much of Advocate's regionalization plan is too preliminary to discuss, Maggio said. There has been too much misinformation in preliminary documents and plans, which have been months in the making and could be changed by end of the week, he said.

Village Trustee Vernard Alsberry, who is employed at South Suburban Hospital, said he nonetheless fears Advocate does plan to merge staffs. South Suburban's medical staff will not be happy with a merger and that may result in employees leaving, resulting in a struggling hospital, he asserted.

Alsberry also said with the integration plan some of the "feel-good programs" specific to the community could be left out.

"We really have to ask some hard questions and get some real answers," he said. "Us talking about this is going to put a different spin on this."

Alsberry said a recent multimillion-dollar expansion program at the hospital, including a new intensive care unit scheduled to open this fall, is a needed capital improvement. However, he claimed, other work done on the hospital in the last five years has merely maintained operations but not expanded services.

Freed said during the meeting he fears racial redlining — that Advocate is investing less in South Suburban because of the area's racial demographics.

Advocate also has been targeted by the Service Employees International Union, which has been seeking to organize some of Advocate's workers. The union released a report last year alleging nearly 10 times more money was spent on hospitals in predominantly white areas versus minority areas.

Advocate officials have repeatedly said the union's claims were "false, groundless and an unjust characterization of Advocate's faith-based health care ministry."

The union had also attacked Advocate's plan to boost its presence in the southwest market through development of a new hospital near the intersection of LaGrange Road and Interstate 80.

The Illinois Health Facilities Planning Board rejected plans for a new hospital in November saying hospitals including South Suburban and St. James in Olympia Fields are a 15- to 20-minute drive away.

Officials from Advocate and St. Francis Hospital and Health Centers, which also is vying for a new southwest hospital, will return to the state board with revised plans later this year.

Through it all, Maggio said Advocate wants everybody "in the know," including Hazel Crest leadership. Village officials and area legislators were scheduled to meet with administrators at South Suburban Wednesday afternoon.

"We want the world to know what's happening," Maggio said.

Clare Walters may be reached at [cwalters@starnewspapers.com](mailto:cwalters@starnewspapers.com) or (708) 802-8017