

## Hospital chain accused of neglecting minority areas

December 12, 2004

**BY DAVE NEWBART Staff Reporter**

Clergy, politicians and a local union Saturday blasted Advocate Health Care for allegedly building up its hospitals in white areas while neglecting others that serve minorities.

A state representative and a City Council member said they planned hearings as early as next month on Advocate, which they say violates its commitment to serve poor and minority communities. They questioned its tax-exempt status.

"They walked away from those hospitals, and that's not right," Ald. Ed Smith (28th) said at a meeting at a West Side church. Smith plans to hold hearings before the City Council's Health Committee, which he chairs.

### **Officials dispute report**

A report issued earlier this month by the Service Employees International Union found Advocate invested 800 percent more on significant capital improvements at four hospitals serving mainly white patients than at four hospitals serving mainly minorities. Between 1995 and 2003, Advocate spent \$232 million at hospitals in Barrington, Downers Grove, Park Ridge and Oak Lawn, vs. \$26 million at three hospitals in the city and a fourth in Hazel Crest, the union's review of state records found.

That translates to \$14,044 per licensed bed at the affluent hospitals, compared with \$3,184 at the other four. During that time, Advocate made \$739.6 million in profits, the study said. Advocate officials dispute the report.

### **Nurse cites deficiencies**

State Rep. Mary Flowers (D-Chicago) called the union's findings "a crime." She plans to take members of the Health Care Availability Access Committee she chairs on a tour of some of Advocate's hospitals to highlight the disparities.

Lisa Reed, a registered nurse at South Suburban Hospital in Hazel Crest, said some windows leak when it rains, one wing has no hot water in some patient rooms, and the hospital sometimes doesn't have enough IV pumps. She said the hospital often uses old equipment passed down from the more affluent hospitals.

Mike Maggio, spokesman for Advocate Health Care, declined to respond to employee charges but said the union's report was misleading.

Advocate officials said it was more accurate to look at total spending per patient. At their three city hospitals, they spend \$854 per patient, vs. \$505 at suburban centers.

"We welcome any hearings," Maggio said. "We can show the report by SEIU is a distortion, is groundless and does not tell the truth."