

Hospital plans to downsize

Written by

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At a Friday afternoon May 22 meeting, Washington County Memorial Hospital (WCMH) Interim CEO Joe Roche spoke quite specifically about the need to consider either downsizing or eliminating certain departments/units at the hospital. Currently on the chopping block are Obstetrics (OB), Oncology (ON), and the Intensive Care Unit (ICU). Although no decision has been made yet, the writing is on the wall.

An example of the tough realities facing WCMH is the ongoing problems with keeping the Obstetrics Unit open. According to Roche, in order for OB staff to stay proficient in dealing with difficult births and for the unit to stop losing nearly \$1 million a year, approximately 300 birthing procedures would need to be performed annually.; in 2008 only eighty-eight birth occurred at WCMH. According to information received from the Washington County Health Department the last time that 300 births occurred in the county was 1982.

Consideration is being given to consolidating the facilities currently being used for the Intensive Care Unit with the Medical/Surgery Unit. According to Melissa Richardson, Public Relations Director for WMCH, only about 30% of all patients currently admitted to ICU are "true" ICU patients. The rest are Medical/Surgery Unit patients kept in ICU for less than 24 hours. If this consolidation is made, all long term ICU patients will be transferred to other medical facilities in the area.

In a May 28 news conference, Roche went on to explain the rationale behind his plans. In an effort to improve the quality of health services provided to the community and eliminate \$5.5 million loss per year, Roche indicated that \$2 million a year can be saved by closing the aforementioned departments.

Another \$1 million dollars a year can be saved by renegotiating supplier contracts and insurance payment agreements. Roche explained that St. Vincent Health's purchasing power will make a significant difference.

Still another \$1 million a year can be saved by making changes to the EMS/ambulance service while an additional \$500,000 a year increase in revenue from improved billing practices can be realized. Altogether, Roche's plan expects to decrease expense by approximately \$3.5 million a year and increase revenues \$2 million per year.

A positive outcome of the downsizing is that no plans are in the work for layoffs. Roche said that for quite a while the hospital staff has been decreasing by means of attrition.

When asked about the pending bankruptcy of WCMH through the non-profit corporation Critical Access Health Services, Roche simply said that in order for the hospital to survive and become a strong asset again for the community, some difficult decision and actions must be taken.