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Charity hospital may be forced to cut services

Houma Today | 06.04.08

Jeremy Alford

BATON ROUGE -- If the Legislature doesn't come up with \$35 million in additional money by June 23, Louisiana's charity hospitals, including Leonard J. Chabert Medical Center in Houma, would be forced to scale back services beginning next month.

Despite escaping significant cuts by the Legislature this year, officials with the charity system contend more money is needed to continue services at the same pace and maintain rebuilding efforts in the New Orleans region.

As for what kinds of setbacks the Terrebonne Parish hospital might face, officials say they are unsure where the budget holes might appear this summer.

Dr. Michael Butler, the acting CEO of Louisiana State University's Health Care Services Division, sent a letter to lawmakers that addresses the dilemma in general terms.

"We cannot be specific regarding which clinics or services will be closed at which hospitals at this time; however, this will certainly mean drastic reductions in the services available to those who have no other viable options," he wrote.

Decisions on cutbacks will be made July 1, after the new fiscal year begins, he added.

The LSU system's budget is set to increase by \$89 million next year, up to \$952 million, but that boost is already earmarked for recovery efforts and basic services.

One bill that could help -- at Chabert, at least -- is pending a hearing in the House Health and Welfare Committee.

Senate Bill 402 by Sen. Bill Cassidy, R-Baton Rouge, would alter the way money for uninsured care is distributed to many of Louisiana's charity hospitals, including the medical center in Houma, but the change would come chiefly on the back of New Orleans' fledgling system.

It would "correct a disparity," Cassidy said, that exists in the way taxpayer dollars are directed to the New Orleans University Hospital.

He said New Orleans' hospital receives \$3,144 per uninsured resident, as compared to the \$1,006 stipend the Leonard J. Chabert Medical Center in Houma is allotted.

For New Orleans, that's \$308 million annually.

When placed against the total \$653 million the state spends each year on uninsured care, it becomes clear that the Crescent City is getting nearly 50 percent of the budget even though it's home to only 20 percent of the state's uninsured population, said Cassidy.

S.B. 402 is expected to be debated sometime next week.

[http://www.houmatoday.com/article/20080603/ARTICLES/806030317/1211/NEWS01&title=Charity hospital may be forced to cut services](http://www.houmatoday.com/article/20080603/ARTICLES/806030317/1211/NEWS01&title=Charity%20hospital%20may%20be%20forced%20to%20cut%20services)

Delay decisions on 'Big Charity'

The Advocate | 06.04.08

Sandra Stokes

The Foundation for Historical Louisiana, pursuant to its charge in House Concurrent Resolution 89 of the 2006 Regular Session of the Legislature, has recently hired the firm of RMJM Hillier to do an independent assessment of Charity Hospital in New Orleans.

RMJM Hillier is an internationally renowned architectural firm that specializes in both preservation and state-of-the-art health-care design.

Due to be completed by Aug. 21, this in-depth evaluation will be the first study to determine the structural integrity of this building and the possibilities of restoring and renovating Charity to a first-rate medical facility.

Charity Hospital has been a part of Louisiana's architectural, cultural and medical heritage for 272 years.

Recently, the National Trust for Historic Preservation listed the hospital and its adjacent neighborhood as one of America's 11 most-treasured and endangered sites.

Since its closing there have been several assessments of the hospital, but only to determine the monetary amount of damages to be reimbursed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency. There has been no study to determine the viability and reuse potential of this monumental landmark. That is, until now.

The Foundation for Historical Louisiana has worked diligently to fulfill the charge unanimously passed by the 2006 Legislature in House Concurrent Resolution 89. HCR89 provided no appropriation, thus the study is being funded by the Foundation for Historical Louisiana and donors.

We are proud to have been chosen to lead this fact-finding mission to provide the first independent assessment of the building and to determine its viability for any future medical use. With the cooperation of the state Office of Facility Planning and LSU, RMJM Hillier has begun this critical evaluation to gather the full data.

We ask that all decisions concerning Charity Hospital and/or a proposed new hospital, which will demolish more than 25 blocks of historic homes and businesses in a National Register of Historic Places neighborhood, be put on hold until we have the results from this assessment of a Louisiana icon.

Our findings will be issued to the full Legislature, LSU Board of Supervisors, state Office of Facility Planning and the Louisiana Recovery Authority by Aug. 21

<http://www.theadvocate.com/opinion/19515169.html>

Officials seek money for Chabert levee

Houma Today | 06.04.08

NIKKI BUSKEY

HOUMA -- It came within inches of flooding during 2005's Hurricane Rita and had to be evacuated during the driving rain and howling winds, a clear sign to hospital officials that something must be done to protect Leonard J. Chabert Medical Center from future storms.

Since the storm, hospital officials have sought money for a ring levee to be built around the Houma hospital. A request made to the state Coastal Restoration and Protection Authority in February netted half a million dollars in state surplus money for the proposed levee.

At Monday's Terrebonne Levee District meeting, the levee board voted unanimously to handle construction of the project and to hire an engineer to design the proposed levee.

The authority had asked the Levee District to act as local project sponsor.

"We agreed to be the recipient of the money and build the project," said Windell Curole, interim regional Terrebonne Levee District director and Coastal Restoration and Protection Authority board member.

Curole said local lawmakers have asked for another half million to help build the levee, a barrier that would be an estimated 6-7 feet high.

"If we get more money, we can get better protection," he said.

The levee, Curole said, "would ensure the hospital's use after the storm and give it a better chance of surviving. Even if we evacuate the hospital, it's an important state facility, and we'd be in a very bad situation if it flooded and we were unable to open it back up after a storm."

State Sen. Reggie Dupre, D-Bourg, said Hurricane Rita underscored the need to act.

"The hospital had to be evacuated, and water got into the parking lot and was inches away from entering the first floor of the building," he said. Had that happened, he said, it "would have caused millions in damages" to the equipment and building, and it could have "shut down the hospital for weeks and weeks, at the very least."

Curole said hospital officials have sought protection for the medical center since Rita, seeking money from several different avenues to build the proposed levee.

"The need was there and they had been through different agencies and different requests," Curole said.

Dupre said he plans to ask Parish President Michel Claudet to contribute parish money to expand the project, extending it from the Industrial Boulevard pump station to Grand Caillou Road.

"Instead of just protecting Chabert, we might be able to take this concept and make it into an interim protection system for a substantial area of east Houma," Dupre said, adding that Hurricane Rita came equally close to flooding parts of Acadian subdivision.

For now, the officials are focused on protecting the hospital, Curole said, adding he would be open to the idea of expansion if it's possible.

"Anything we can do to improve our situation," he said.

Though the project is still in its early stages, the basic idea is to "box-in" the hospital along Industrial Boulevard and Grand Caillou Road.

The design could change if the scope of the protection for the area is expanded.

"It's a concept, it's an idea right now," Curole said.

However, if engineered and built properly, a levee that just surrounds the hospital shouldn't make flooding in the area worse for other businesses and property owners, he added.

"Not if it's designed right. That's called engineering," Curole said.

[http://www.houmatoday.com/article/20080603/ARTICLES/806030319/1211/news01&title=Officials seek money for Chabert levee](http://www.houmatoday.com/article/20080603/ARTICLES/806030319/1211/news01&title=Officials_seek_money_for_Chabert_levee)

Health Insurer Lobby Releases Plan To Reduce U.S. Health Care Costs by \$145B Kaiser Network.org | 06.04.08

Officials from America's Health Insurance Plans have proposed a plan they estimate could reduce U.S. health care spending by \$145 billion by 2015, The Politico reports. The group plans to present its findings to congressional committee chairs and ranking members and to hold a policy briefing.

The group's proposals for reducing costs include:

- * Creating a system for comparing the cost and effectiveness of treatments;
- * Adopting electronic health records, e-visits with physicians and other tools;
- * Revamping the medical malpractice system;
- * Creating incentives for value-based health care; and
- * Improving disease management and prevention programs.

In addition, AHIP officials have been gathering "more comprehensive data" to help strengthen the organization's proposal for a "public-private partnership model," The Politico reports. According to the data, health care cost increases are at their lowest rate in 10 years. The trend is a result of systems that insurers implemented in the 1990s, industry officials say.

The Senate Finance Committee on Tuesday is scheduled to hold a hearing addressing rising health care costs and quality of care. Later in June, Committee Chair Max Baucus (D-Mont.) and ranking member Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) will hold a bipartisan congressional summit to discuss health care options for next year.

Comments

AHIP President Karen Ignagni said, "Now that members of Congress are beginning to turn their attention to comprehensive discussions, how to look at the three areas of cost, access and quality, we are going to be stepping up our activities even more." She added, "We don't want to contribute only by way of reacting to other proposals. What we've done is gone on an 18-month, in-depth effort to provide ideas ourselves."

AHIP spokesperson Michael Tuffin said, "It's important for us to lay a marker down because, within the health care issue that voters are really concerned about, cost is their No.1 concern." He added, "They see cost and access as one and the same, and sometimes in Washington we separate those things" (Frates, The Politico, 6/2).

http://www.kaisernetwork.org/daily_reports/rep_hpolicy.cfm#52504