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Camden-Clark Memorial, St. Joseph's Hospitals to Join West Virginia United Health System

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New arrangement expected to reduce costs and add new services; federal and state approval pending.

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Camden-Clark Memorial Hospital and St. Joseph's Hospital officials announced at a Sept. 16 news conference in Parkersburg their intention to join the West Virginia United Health System.



Efficiency of operations is just one benefit that Camden-Clark CEO Mike King expects for the region's health care consumers.

"We will expand and enhance our services in ways many of us never dreamed possible under the existing arrangement," King said.

Steve Peterson, chief financial officer of St. Joseph's owner Signature Hospital Corp., said the new arrangement would make the hospital a stronger, better place to receive quality care.

The plan is for WVUHS to purchase St. Joseph's and for CCMH to join WVUHS as a member.

The hospitals would be operated as one organization with two campuses, according to WVUHS CEO Tom Jones.

Regional hospitals have been hit hard by reimbursement cuts and competition from doctors' offices and clinics, Jones said.

The proposed arrangement has been in the works for about six months, he said.

"St. Joseph's was for sale," he explained.

"We were also simultaneously having discussions with Camden-Clark about potentially coming into our system," he continued. "Basically, it was viewed by all parties that it would be a positive thing for Parkersburg for the two hospitals to be put together. WVUHS became the facilitator for this to occur."

All plans are provisional, however, until federal and state approval are granted.

The parties are seeking federal approval through a Hart-Scott-Rodino anti-trust filing with the Federal Trade Commission's Bureau of Competition.

And they will need a Certificate of Need from the West Virginia Health Care Authority. Jones expects to file a letter of intent and then to file the application by the beginning of October.

"We're optimistic about approval," Jones said.

Jones detailed a wide range of benefits for the Parkersburg region once the proposed arrangement is complete: among them, lower costs through elimination of duplicative services and larger purchasing programs, better access to capital through WVUHS's higher bond rating, new possibilities for medical education and research programs, and the lower mortality and higher quality of care that have been documented for institutions associated with teaching hospitals.

Full federal and state approval could take four to six months, Jones said.

He did not yet know under what name the new, merged entity would operate.

WVUHS was created in 1996 by the state Legislature and includes, in addition to WVU Hospitals and the two hospitals of WVUH-East, United Hospital Center in Clarksburg.

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