

OUR OPINION

Good Move

Hospitals' move good for area

Thursday's bombshell announcement concerning the future of the city's two hospitals probably left many residents wondering what this will mean for them and their loved ones. While this concern is understandable, in our opinion, it means health care in our area is taking a giant step forward.

West Virginia United Hospital Systems — the largest health care system based in West Virginia and the second-largest employer in the state — is seeking federal and state approval to purchase St. Joseph's Hospital from its current owner, Signature Hospital Corp., for \$87 million.

Camden-Clark Memorial Hospital, while not part of the sale, will simultaneously become affiliated with United Hospital Systems creating, in essence, one hospital located on two campuses just blocks apart.

During the press conference, and a subsequent meeting with *The Parkersburg News and Sentinel* editorial board, all parties to the announcement explained why they think this will benefit everyone — residents and employees.

The biggest advantage is the sale of St. Joseph's and Camden-Clark's simultaneous move puts both hospitals under one — WVUH — umbrella. This will allow both hospitals to streamline operations and avoid duplication of services. It also will offer each hospital an opportunity to specialize in an area of health care. In the words of current St. Joseph's CEO Jack Julius, it will allow the hospitals to become a "medical destination" for patients who now are forced to travel to other locations for specialized care.

As for the hospitals' 2,100 employees, Tom Jones, CEO of WVUH, foresees them still being employed by the new entity, although some may be doing different jobs in the future.

Everyone in the Mid-Ohio Valley is aware of the often-contentious relationship between the two hospitals, mostly due to competition. They have, at times, resembled spoiled children fighting over a toy. The open-heart surgery controversy is the best example, but it manifested itself on many occasions in many different things.

One reason we feel this move will be a success is because WVUH will see that it works. WVUH operates hospitals in Morgantown, Clarksburg and in the Eastern Panhandle cities of Martinsburg and Ransom. The situation in the later two cities before their affiliation with WVUH was similar to Parkersburg with two competing hospitals. Since the affiliation, the hospitals have grown with jobs and provided economic stimulus to the Eastern Panhandle.

"Parkersburg represents a natural progression of the WVU Health Network," Jones said.

We agree.

Papers will be filed with the Federal Trade Commission and the state's Health Care Authority seeking approval for the proposed affiliation and purchase. Jones said it will be four to six months before it is known if approval would be granted. In the meantime, both hospitals would operate as the separate entities they are now.

Change can be a scary proposition. However, it does not mean it is bad. We feel this is a good move for Parkersburg.

NEWSANDSENTINEL.COM POLL

How much will the proposed confederation of St. Joseph's Hospital, Camden-Clark Memorial Hospital and the West Virginia United Health Services improve area health care?

Tremendously	14 percent
A lot	15 percent
Some	12 percent
Not much.....	18 percent
Very little	17 percent
None.....	24 percent