

Hospital expansion tied up in red tape

Once approved, first phase expected to add 112 patient beds and a trauma center

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VICTORVILLE — Despite the growing demand for hospital care in the Victor Valley, expansions of St. Mary Medical Center and Desert Valley Hospital will not be available for a few years due to government red tape.

According to local hospital administrators, the roughly 500 hospital beds in Victor Valley will soon be inadequate. This will not change until the completion of a review by the Office of Statewide Health and Planning Department (OSHPD) in Sacramento.

Pending review it could be seven years before St. Mary's new facility in west Victorville treats new patients, according to spokesman Randy Bevilacqua.

“We’ve bought the 100 acres and we’re selecting our architects this summer, but any submissions have to go through OSHPD will probably add four years,” said Bevilacqua. “Without OSHPD review required in Sacramento, we could treat the first in-patient in only three years.”

The first phase of construction will add 112 patient beds and a trauma center.

“As the business and the population grows the development will add increments of 112 beds, eventually building out to 488 beds,” he said.

A 65-bed expansion of Desert Valley Hospital is awaiting state approval and could treat new patients within three years, said administrator John Rossfeld.

“We can open the expansion two years after we get approval,” he said. “We’ve been waiting for 13 months and we’d anticipated that we’d have it by now. I hope it won’t take another year.”

Since St. Mary’s expects to see 62,000 emergency room visits this fiscal year, hospital officials are talking with the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors to create a trauma unit ahead of any other construction.

The Board of Supervisors will select a consultant to study whether or not the region can support a trauma unit and a report is expected by the end of the summer, said Bevilacqua.

“It’s about whether or not the region is ready for prime time,” he said. “Trauma is a rather specialized service and if there aren’t enough patients, the physicians lose their edge and there wouldn’t be enough revenue to support them. One of the reasons we chose that 100 acres near the I-15 for the site was because it’s near the center of mass and close to the freeway, so the trauma center would be close by.”

The smaller Desert Valley Hospital is expecting 33,000 emergency room patients and will also be adding new services as part of its construction, including new cardiovascular labs and an open-heart surgery department.

“It’s been a challenge to accommodate the needs of the growing population, but we are just managing,” said Rossfeld.

One development that has already broken ground is a parking lot covered by solar panels that will generate 10 percent of the hospital’s electricity according to Robert Diehl, vice president of strategic planning at St. Mary’s.

“The solar panels will offset 194.35 kW, or \$50,000 of our electric bill,” said Diehl.

The OSHPD reviews of hospital construction last anywhere from 18 months to four years depending on the structure details, according to spokesman Patrick Sullivan.

The 115-bed Victor Valley Community Hospital is discussing plans to accommodate growth in the High Desert, but has no details at this time, said a spokeswoman.

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