

Jupiter Medical disputes need for hospital

By Debbie Batteiger Special to Treasure Coast Newspapers

Posted October 19, 2011 at 4 a.m., updated October 20, 2011 at 2:45 p.m.



John Couris



Jupiter Mayor Karen Golonka

Tenet Healthcare, which owns five hospitals in Palm Beach County, has applied with the Florida Agency for Health Care Administration to build a teaching hospital to partner with Scripps Research Institute's biomedical research program.

However, Jupiter Medical Center doesn't agree with Tenet's reasoning for needing a new structure and will fight the hospital from being built, its CEO says.

Existing hospitals can fill the needs of the community and Scripps, John Couris, Jupiter Medical Center's CEO, said.

"Simply put, there is absolutely no need for an additional hospital. On average, (Palm Beach County) hospitals are underutilized. Good Samaritan Hospital is in the mid 30 percent; St. Marys, 60 percent; Palm Beach Gardens, high 60 and Jupiter Medical Center, high 70s," he said.

Although Tenet Healthcare was not part of the plan when Scripps was being courted to make its home in Palm Beach County, building a teaching hospital was, Shannon LaRocque, assistant county administrator, said. LaRocque has been working to this end for seven years, she said.

If the proposal is accepted, the new hospital would be located on the south side of Donald Ross Road, between I-95 and Military Trail in Palm Beach Gardens, near the existing campus of Scripps Research Institute, Florida Atlantic University and the Max Planck Florida Institute.

"The state and the county partnered in a \$700 million (project) to bring Scripps to Palm Beach County to bring high technology to the area," she said. "The one missing component now (to make it successful) is an academic research center."

Scripps approached Tenet Healthcare because of the size of the organization, LaRocque said.

"(The county) absolutely supports this, we want to see a return to ensure a long-term, broad vision," she said. "We want to grow, grow, grow."

Harry Orf, vice president of scientific operations at Scripps Research Institute, said that in coming to Florida, the vision included a medical school affiliation and a teaching hospital since the beginning.

"In Florida, we have a heavy emphasis on translation research — scientific to pretrial stage," he said. "It's a bench to bedside continuum. When we began discussions in 2004 there was no medical school in the area. With the

achievement of Florida Atlantic University's medical school, we teamed up with them."

A "natural progression" was to build a teaching hospital to complete the research started in the lab, Orf said.

A new hospital is necessary due to the space needed by students and doctors and the existing hospitals can't expand to meet those needs, said Shelly Weiss Friedberg, director of public relations Tenet Healthcare, Florida Region.

"There is a 20-year plan for the future of the new hospital developing it from the original 80 beds to 200 beds," she said. "The overall goal of Scripps, FAU, and Tenet Healthcare is that the proposed hospital will expand the opportunities for clinical research, graduate medical education and medical and surgical services while providing even better access to state-of-the-art medical care."

Couris doesn't understand the desire to build another hospital, he said.

"From our perspective, there are 13 hospitals in the county. These 13 hospitals can support any research that needs to be done. What we've been doing — well before the announcement that Tenet would be applying to the state — is doing just that," he said.

Some of the research Jupiter Medical Center is involved with currently includes a new clinical trial partnering with the Margaret W. Niedland Breast Center to study breast cancer prevention in women; and conducting research on human cancer tissue with Scripps Research Institute.

The JMC is strong and can support research, Couris said. Couris sees only one reason for the application for a teaching hospital, made by Tenet on Oct. 12, he said.

"This is a market grab for Tenet. This will cannibalize our services — orthopedic, spine, oncology, digestive, senior care," he said. "We've just

(broke ground for) a \$50 million expansion, we're the largest orthopedic spine center in the area, and our medical center does a great job."

If the application is accepted, JMC has until Nov. 3 to respond. A final decision will be made by the state on Dec. 9.

"Typically in these situations, the losing party takes the other to court. Absolutely no doubt we will do that," he said.

Tenet would "cross the bridge when we come to it," Friedberg said

Jupiter Mayor Karen Golonka, a nonpaid member of the JMC board of trustees, said this issue is complex.

"I am concerned about potential negative consequences to our acute health care services in Jupiter," Golonka said. "I don't know all the specifics but (Tenet) will need to demonstrate a need for a new hospital and the facts just don't seem to support that."

Golonka believes Jupiter residents need to understand the impact a new hospital, although meant to be built in Palm Beach Gardens, can mean to their community, she said.

"It does have the potential to negatively impact our hospital services," Golonka said. "Obstetrics is one of the service areas that could be affected. I continue to hope Tenet and Scripps are willing to work together for a solution (that is beneficial to the community)."

<http://www.tcpalm.com/news/2011/oct/19/jupiter-medical-disputes-need-for-hospital/>