

Hospital concerns addressed

Officials answer questions about closure of Irvine facility.

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Questions about the approaching closure of Irvine Regional Hospital linger.

Health care workers worry where they'll go next and residents wonder where they'll go for health care - and what it will cost them.

Hoag Memorial Hospital Presbyterian, headquartered in Newport Beach, is set in February to take over and temporarily shutter the medical building on Sand Canyon. Twelve to 24 months later, a new Hoag hospital will open in the footprint of Irvine Regional.

Hoag CEO Richard Afable said the nonprofit health care provider needs to make renovations on the 19-year-old structure to bring it up to "21st-century standards."

Like Irvine Regional, the new Hoag will be an acute-care hospital, meaning it will provide short-term medical treatment. Unlike Irvine Regional, it will focus on orthopedics but not offer interventional cardiac or pediatric services.

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In the meantime, Kaiser Permanente Orange County has offered to open - and possibly expand - its emergency department. Many people have raised concerns about the out-of-pocket fees that will be levied on patients who don't hold membership in Kaiser. A newly opened Kaiser hospital sits across the street

from Irvine Regional.

Orange County Emergency Medical Services will hold a public hearing about the hospital closure at 1 p.m. Monday in the Commission Planning Room at 333 W. Santa Ana Blvd. in Santa Ana.

To answer questions raised by concerned citizens, the city of Irvine tapped representatives from both Kaiser and Hoag. Here's a condensed version of the answers; for a link to the city's complete staff report, go to www.ocregister.com/irvine.

Q: Where will patients with heart disease be sent for interventional cardiac care?

A: If paramedics diagnose an acute heart attack outside a hospital, the patient will be taken directly to a Cardiac Receiving Center (CRC). Aside from Irvine Regional, two CRCs - Saddleback Memorial Medical Center in Laguna Hills and Western Medical Center in Santa Ana - are within a six-mile radius of Irvine.

If presented to Kaiser's emergency department, such a patient will receive clot-dissolving therapy under the supervision of on-site cardiologists. If symptoms resolve, the patient will undergo elective cardiac catheterization or be transferred to Anaheim Memorial Medical Center, a CRC, when stable. If symptoms persist, the patient will be transferred to the nearest CRC for open-heart stent surgery.

For patients with chest

pain, Kaiser will administer non-invasive tests and if necessary, cardiac catheterization. Patients may also be transferred to Anaheim Memorial or another CRC.

- Kaiser response

Q: After Jan. 15, what happens to patients who need other critical care now provided by Irvine Regional?

A: Physicians currently staffed at Irvine Regional may choose to admit their patients at any other area hospital for which they have privileges.

- Hoag response

Q: Kaiser's emergency department will admit patients who are not Kaiser members. But what happens if all the beds are tied up?

A: During busy times, such as the impending flu season, Kaiser continues to triage patients based on the severity of their symptoms. Additional staff and physicians are called in to speed up patient flow. If the 36-bed department reaches full capacity, Emergency Medical Services will be alerted to divert cases to the closest emergency room. Kaiser is also planning to expand the number of available inpatient rooms and staff members.

- Kaiser

Q: What is the city of Irvine's role in this matter?

A: The city has no official oversight, governance or authority over the hospital closure. The City Council will continue to facilitate public information and provide a public forum.

- Irvine city attorney's office

