

# Oakland hospital group eyes lease of Wayne facility

An Oakland County operator of five Catholic hospitals is considering taking over the troubled Westland Medical Center, the former Wayne County General Hospital.

The board of Mercy Health Corp. of Farmington Hills Friday will consider the purchase of a lease to operate Westland Medical Center, whose problems have continued even under private ownership.

Wayne County Executive William Lucas leased the Merriman Reed facility in 1984 to Southwest Detroit Hospital Corp.

"There is no strong Catholic presence in southwest Wayne County, and we'd be interested in that," said Mercy spokesman Leroy D. Fahle, chief executive officer at Mount Carmel Hospital. It is one of the five hospitals Mercy operates in southeastern Michigan.

"It would provide us with an important access point. It would improve our ability to distribute our resources between Mount Carmel in Detroit and our Catherine McAuley Center in Ann Arbor."

OFFICIALS are hopeful that if given the nod they could take over as soon as Jan. 1.

Fahle said negotiations began in earnest last August. So far board members have informally expressed enthusiasm for the project.

"I don't think we'll get any arguments that it's compatible with our mission to serve the economically disadvantaged," Fahle said.

Fahle said there is potential for population growth and a need for hospital facilities because of development of the I-275 corridor to the west, along the I-696 corridor to the north and around Metropolitan Airport to the south.

THE 310-BED center under has only a 28 percent occupancy rate. Last year, Southwest, which also

runs the 244-bed Southwest Detroit Hospital in Detroit, listed \$2.6 million in operating losses. When Wayne County operated it as the County General Hospital, its losses averaged \$15-\$18 million.

The Mercy administrator guessed his corporation will need to spend some \$7 million in the next four years to make improvements at Westland and to convert its four-bed rooms to two-bed rooms.

MERCY CORP. operates 21 hospitals in Michigan, Indiana, Iowa and New York. Mount Carmel is licensed for 587 beds in Detroit. The Mercy group also operates the McAuley Center in Ann Arbor, St. Joseph-Mercy Hospital in Pontiac, and Samaritan in Detroit.

Each hospital is administered by a separate board.

Wayne County Commissioner Kay Beard, D-Inkster, whose district includes the hospital, opposed privatizing the facility two years ago but said she was pleased with the latest development.

There are still eight years remaining in a 10-year lease between the county and private hospital operation. The hospital remains one of more than a dozen facilities in the Detroit area which contracts to provide medical care for indigent persons.

BEARD SAID she hoped the transfer in ownership would provide Westland Medical with a financial shot in the arm, one that could help the center regain its status as a major trauma center.

Fahle said it may take years because of the costly "standby" expenses associated with such emergency service.

Charles Arnold, a trustee at Southwest, said his board's concern is that "health care for low and moderately income people will be provided."

# You swallow new 'Pacemaker'

People who are physically unable to take a treadmill test can now have their hearts effectively tested by swallowing a small "pacemaker pill" according to researchers at the University of Michigan Medical Center.

Physicians from the U-M Medical Center's Department of Internal Medicine described the first use of the experimental technique for stress testing before the American Heart Association in Dallas.

Dr. Jack Juni, assistant professor of internal medicine in the Division of Nuclear Medicine at the U-M Medical Center, reported that of 65 patients tested with the pill, 53 had their hearts successfully tested.

"Because of advanced disease or fatigue," Juni said, "about 30 percent of heart patients recommended for an exercise stress test cannot

perform enough exercise to give physicians the information they need to make an accurate diagnosis."

JUNI BELIEVES the new testing method will prove highly beneficial to doctors and their patients.

"The key benefit," he said, "is that we will be able to detect and accurately diagnose heart disease in a fairly large group of patients who currently aren't being adequately tested because we cannot stress their hearts sufficiently."

The new method is called "combined transesophageal atrial pacing."

It uses two hair-thin wires embedded in a gelatin shell the size of a cold capsule. The patient swallows the pill, drawing the wires into the esophagus.

After the capsule dissolves, the

wires are positioned in the esophagus within a quarter inch of the patient's left atrium, the left upper chamber of the heart. The wires are then connected to a laboratory pacemaker.

"Within five to 10 minutes," Juni said, "we can increase the patient's heart rate to the same levels that would be achieved on a treadmill." He also has the patient perform about a minute of handgrip exercises to raise blood pressure, which further simulates what happens to the body during treadmill workouts.

PATIENTS WITH advanced pulmonary disease, peripheral vascular disease, paralysis, severe arthritis or weakness in the legs may benefit from the pacemaker pill, he said.

Juni observed that pill electrode

spacing will not replace cardiac catheterization. This more elaborate diagnostic procedure, which requires hospitalization, involves threading a thin plastic tube through the heart's arteries, injecting contrast material, through the tube and into the heart, and taking X-rays.

"The new technique also will help physicians to accurately predict who needs catheterization and who doesn't. It will help make diagnosis of heart disease among this special group of patients more efficient," Juni said.

Researchers at the U-M Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, the U-M Bioengineering Program and the Pritzker Research Institute in Chicago assisted in the development and testing of the pacing device.

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