

May 31, 2013

Testimony submitted to the Capital Construction Subcommittee of Ways and Means

In Support of the Oregon State Hospital Replacement Project at the Junction City Site

PeaceHealth is a nonprofit health system with four hospitals in Lane County. Our 36-bed acute care inpatient behavioral health unit, known as the Johnson Unit, is located at Sacred Heart Medical Center, University District, in Eugene. It is the state's largest private acute care inpatient unit for treatment of people with severe mental illness who do not need the more intensive services provided by the Oregon State Hospital. We receive referrals from across the state seeking placement for patients who require a higher level of care than is available in their communities.

We admit approximately 1,200 patients a year who need short-term, acute mental health care to stabilize their condition before being discharged or referred to an outpatient community-based program, to a residential treatment facility for longer-term care, or to the state hospital. The Oregon State Hospital is a critical partner in the continuum of care. It is uniquely positioned to take patients who require services beyond what we can provide, either because the patient needs long-term, intensive treatment, or because the patient has been adjudicated through the court system and is under the jurisdiction of the Psychiatric Security Review Board. To remain an effective partner and serve forensic (criminal) and other critically ill patients, OSH needs the capacity that the Junction City hospital will create.

Currently we have three patients who have been waiting up to 50 days for state hospital beds to open up. As a result of this wait, our average length of stay is inching upward and now stands at 10.2 days, compared to about eight days typically in the Johnson Unit (and about four in the rest of the hospital). Length of stay is one of the main factors contributing to higher health care costs. Our occupancy rate is approaching 90%. By way of context, inpatient units with an average occupancy above 85% are basically closed to admissions most of the time because there is no flexibility to accommodate patients in need who cannot safely wait for care.

(continued)

Cost is one factor of concern, but so is quality of care. Patients who need the intensity and level of care provided at the state hospital cannot be optimally served at our facility where we don't have the necessary expertise, resources or programs in place. When patients must wait in our unit for a state hospital bed to open up, that means we are delaying care to patients whom we could help but for whom we have no bed.

While we are not set up to routinely serve forensic patients who need protective custody, patients who are a danger to themselves or others still come to our Emergency Department and are admitted. As an indicator of insufficient system capacity, we have experienced an increase in assaults on our staff (punching, choking). It is now occurring two to three times a month – triple last year's rate. We have systems in place to keep staff as safe as possible and thus have been able to prevent more serious assaults, but the increase in violence is of great concern.

We encourage the state to take a long-term view of our mental health system. The need for the new beds at the Junction City Hospital will not go away and in fact will only grow and manifest in other systems, such as law enforcement, child welfare, county public health and so on. It will not be less expensive to build these beds later. Debating whether we should build a hospital for acute inpatient care or invest in community-based outpatient or residential treatment creates a false choice: We need all options to allow for successful transitions between programs and to keep patients and communities safe.

.

We strongly support the 174-bed Junction City hospital.

Our staff is at your service if we can be a resource to you as you consider this very important public health and safety issue.

Dale Smith, RN
Director, Behavioral Health Services
dsmith3@peacehealth.org
541-696-6983