

A healthier Ontario

2 hospitals coming to city in 2011

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ONTARIO - Though about 175,000 people live in the city - and another 120,000 are expected to settle here over the next two decades - Ontario has no hospitals.

Ontario residents in need of hospital care have had to venture out to San Antonio Community Hospital in Upland or Pomona Valley Hospital Medical Center in Pomona.

But in just a few years, two new full-service hospitals are expected to open in the city.

"Clearly, a city this size should have a full-service hospital," City Manager Greg Devereaux said. "So, we believe we're underserved. Many people here do utilize other hospitals in the area, but, as we grow, there's a need for more facilities."

A Kaiser Permanente campus on Vineyard Avenue currently offers primary and some specialty care, radiology and outpatient surgery, said spokeswoman Jennifer Resch-Silvestri.

By early 2011, there will be a 3-story, 224-bed hospital with acute care and emergency services, a hospital support building with a full spectrum of specialty care, and OB/GYN at the site, Resch-Silvestri said.

And the final maps for the Ontario Gateway development are in the approval process, said developer Chris Atkinson, vice president of The Bates Co.

The project includes a 10-story office tower, parking structure, Embassy Suites, Springhill Suites, Mercedes Benz dealership, and 200-plus bed hospital - all slated for completion around 2011.

The private hospital will be built by Dr. Jeerreddi Prasad, president of Ontario-based ProMed Health Services, which was acquired by Prospect Medical Holdings Inc. last month.

Prasad declined to comment on plans for the hospital and the types of services it would provide Ontario.

Atkinson said Friday, however, that the internal medicine physician and ProMed shareholder was still looking forward to doing the project.

ProMed is an Independent Physician Association, or IPA, and its doctors are under contract with both Pomona Valley Medical Center and San Antonio Community Hospital.

While the promise of two hospitals in the city is cause for some degree of celebration, health-care advocates said it is only one piece of the puzzle.

Dora Barilla, executive director of Healthy Ontario, said more beds do not equate to more health care.

"We're going to have significant growth in the Inland Empire, and we need to look at what we have and what we need," Barilla said. "We do need additional beds, but there are other things we need first before a hospital."

According to Barilla, these include accessible and affordable primary care, urgent care and clinics cooperating with one another.

One consequence of a deficit in these services is overburdened emergency services.

"Obviously, you have an increase in emergency room capacity with non-urgent cases," Barilla said. "People wait to get treatment until conditions have elevated, and it's not treatable."

Healthy Ontario is now compiling and analyzing data on city-specific health issues.

A comprehensive strategic health-care plan should be ready by early 2008, Barilla said.

Mayor Paul Leon said his church offers free medical care once a month, and each month he sees the community's underserved population grow in numbers.

"I intend on making sure the hospital operators understand the needs of the community of Ontario," Leon said of the incoming facilities.

"(The hospital developers) need to have tentacles in the community and help us educate, so our residents can access quality health care without having to rely on 911 and the ER."

Simply building two new hospitals in Ontario won't solve the complex health-care crises, but it will address specific unmet needs in the city and region, said Kathy Roach, spokeswoman for Pomona Valley Hospital Medical Center.

"I can tell you the general area is underbedded," Roach said. "There are not enough beds right now to meet the needs of the greater Pomona-Inland Valley."

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