

Catholic Health announces reconfiguration plan at Mt. St. Mary's Hospital

Catholic Health Press Release

As health care continues its shift from inpatient to outpatient care, and providers everywhere face ongoing staffing and reimbursement challenges, Catholic Health is focusing on the future by developing "Centers of Excellence" within its hospital network and creating a "Neighborhood Hospital" model to serve residents throughout Niagara County.

By concentrating specialized services in facilities equipped with the most advanced technology, the health system is developing a more transformative care delivery model to provide the highest quality care and service to patients across the Buffalo-Niagara region and enable them to receive the majority of their health care within their own community.

"The strength of our system, in terms of quality, safety, and patient satisfaction, is helping us respond to the seismic changes happening in health care as a result of the pandemic and other industry pressures," said Mark Sullivan, president and CEO of Catholic Health. "By proactively responding to these changes and adapting our footprint in Erie and Niagara counties, we can maintain the specialized services our community needs in a more responsible way, and ensure access to care for the long term."

As this important work continues throughout Catholic Health, the system is announcing a reconfiguration plan that will take place at Mount St. Mary's Hospital over the next few weeks.

Plans call for creating a "Neighborhood Hospital" similar to what is being built at the new Lockport Memorial Hospital. The reconfig-

1199SEIU: Nearly 100 union health care workers to be displaced

Submitted by 1199SEIU

Nearly 100 full-time union health care workers at Catholic Health's Mount St. Mary's Hospital in Lewiston are working to find new job placements following an announcement that the hospital would cut critical patient services for rural Niagara County residents. 1199SEIU was notified last week that labor and delivery, surgical services, dialysis and more would shut down patient services by July 1, leaving workers to find new positions within the hospital system or elsewhere.

"We are a community hospital," said Cathy Mahar, registered nurse first assist at Mount St. Mary's Hospital in Lewiston. "We are a family. This is devastating for us and our community. My current job will be eliminated and I'm still trying to get my head around this. I thought I would retire from here and now I just don't know."

As patient care is transferred to new sites within Catholic Health, union workers are left to make the transition, too. Some will need to travel up to 18 miles or more into Erie County should they find a position within the Catholic

Health system there.

"After working for Catholic Health for 37 years, losing my job as a post surgical care nurse is heart-wrenching," said Terri Ross, a registered nurse. "We just found out that services at our hospital will be closing. Since my specialty is no longer here, I plan to take another position within Catholic Health, which will require training and education. I'll have to learn an entirely new position. After being in the same work area for the last 24 years, it will be challenging."

"We are disappointed that the employer didn't notify the union sooner about their plan to cut critical service lines," said Jim Scordato, 1199SEIU vice president for WNY hospitals. "This is the second hospital in Niagara County that will cut or close services this month. The union will work to find our members jobs within their specialty, even if it's outside of the Catholic Health system."

He added, "Inadequate Medicaid funding rates in upstate New York mean that we will continue to see more cuts to hospital and health care services leading to the subsequent

loss of good jobs and access to quality care in our communities."

More than 400 health care workers at Mount St. Mary's Hospital are represented by 1199SEIU, United Healthcare Workers East. Their four-year union contract includes strong language allowing 100 members impacted by the closures to move into vacant and available positions across Catholic Health's system. Currently, all Catholic Health hospitals outside of Mount St. Mary's and the soon-to-be-completed Lockport Memorial Hospital are located in Erie County, leaving workers to juggle family commitments, day care and adjustments to work hours. Some union members could be adversely affected by changes to their wages, benefits, and union security.

1199SEIU continues to review job placement options with 100 union members impacted by the closures.

1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East represents over 400,000 nurses and caregivers throughout Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Maryland, Washington (D.C.) and Florida.

uration will reduce the Lewiston hospital's inpatient bed need; transition surgery, maternity, dialysis and GI services to other Catholic Health hospitals; and discontinue imaging services at its Porter Road site in Niagara Falls.

"Mount St. Mary's is the highest-rated hospital in Niagara County for quality, and Catholic Health leads the region in patient safety. While this reconfiguration is necessary to continue our mission, our commitment to the people of Niagara County will never change," Sullivan added. "Much discernment and planning has gone into this process to ensure patients will have needed medical and emergency services in their own community with improved

access to higher levels of quality care at 'Centers of Excellence' throughout Catholic Health."

As these changes are underway, the hospital will be adding ambulatory surgery services, inpatient medical beds, emergency care, imaging and laboratory services, and primary and specialty care physician practices in eastern Niagara County with the opening of the new Lockport Memorial Hospital in September and the acquisition of Eastern Niagara Hospital's Ambulatory Surgery Center on South Transit Road this month.

Along with inpatient medical services, Mount St. Mary's will maintain its full-service emergency department, 69-bed Clearview substance use treatment center, and wound care center. The hospital will also maintain its broad network of community-based health centers comprised of primary and specialty care clinics, including OB-GYN, cardiology, and neurology services; and outpatient diagnostic and rehabilitation care, including cardiac rehab. As the region's only Joint Commission Certified Primary Stroke Center

equipped with advanced telemedicine technology, Mount St. Mary's will continue to work with area EMS providers to deliver the highest quality stroke care across Niagara County.

"In addition to inpatient medical care and strong emergency services, our goal is to ensure residents throughout Niagara County continue to have access to primary care physicians and medical specialists right in their own community on both sides of the county," said CJ Urlaub, Mount St. Mary's Hospital president and Catholic Health senior vice president for strategic partnerships, integration & care delivery in Niagara County. "For higher levels of care, patients will have improved access to Catholic Health's comprehensive network of services at Mercy Hospital of Buffalo, Sisters of Charity Hospital, and Kenmore Mercy Hospital, along with our expanded ambulatory surgery network."

Over the coming months, Catholic Health will continue to develop "Centers of Excellence" in stroke, cardiovascular, orthopedic, spine, and women's services.

"Leading the transformation of health care in our community means taking bold steps now to position our system for the future," Sullivan said. "Investing in modern facilities, equipped with the latest clinical and information technology, will enable our skilled medical team to continue providing the most advanced care available anywhere in Western New York."

Urlaub added, "While the decision to close services is never easy, our top priority is to ensure our patients continue to receive the highest-quality care, and any impacted associates are provided with other opportunities within our system. Maternity and surgical patients will be receiving information in the coming days to transition their care to other Catholic Health facilities after June 30."

"Staff affected by the changes at Mount St. Mary's will be offered other positions at the hospital, the new Lockport Memorial Hospital, or within Catholic Health. The hospital is working with its union partners to facilitate these transitions and thanks them for their continued support."



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Wallace: Reassessments aren't 'money grabs'

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With assessments low, she said, the impact of the exemptions is reduced, meaning residents aren't receiving the full amount they should get if they're eligible for the STAR or Enhanced STAR.

Low assessments also negatively impact the rate of sales tax collection from Niagara County, she said.

A reassessment also doesn't affect the Town of Niagara much from a money collection aspect, either. With no general fund town tax, Niagara residents don't pay much to the town.

The only taxes the town collects from property tax is a partial Highway Department tax, sewer, water and some special districts for public safety where only residents in those neighborhoods pay.

But, the impact could be big for entities like the school district and Niagara County. As taxing entities, they set a total amount of money to collect called a tax levy. They achieve it by setting a tax rate, which is based on the value of property across their control.

If assessments are 37% of the actual value, the rate will be significantly higher than if property is valued at its current market rate.

That, Wallace said, is why reassessments aren't "money grabs" like opponents call them.

"They're redistributions," he said. "Some residents may end up paying more, while others will end up playing less. It all depends on the assessment."

If reassessments are approved, the earliest impact, Bird told the board, would be in the September 2024 school district bill and the 2025 county and local tax bills.

The next Town Board meeting is set for 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, June 21, at Town Hall, 7105 Lockport Road.

Powering Up

In other town news, officials celebrated the start of operations of Niagara Depot Solar, an array the board approved inside the town's dump dating back to before the COVID-19 pandemic began.

The facility, located at 4798 Lockport Road, began its operations on June 1.

More importantly for the town's business, the operation provides needed rent checks to the town, allowing officials to hold off on any townwide property tax.

A fee schedule calls for quarterly collections of roughly \$13,900 this year, with rent increasing 2% every year through 2047.

The start of operations comes as the board continues deliberating the future of solar arrays in the town. A six-month moratorium on projects like this is under consideration at Wednesday's meeting with the intent to allow the next board that takes over following the November election to make any decisions regarding similar power-generating projects.



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