

Hospital showing signs of recovery, official says

BY RACHEL MOEHL
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A year ago, Mountainside Hospital, most of which sits on Bay Ave. in Glen Ridge, found itself in dire straits. It was losing money at a rate of \$12,000,000 per year.

At the May 27 meeting of the Borough Council, hospital Chief Executive Officer C. Barry Dykes presented an overview of just how far the hospital has come in the past 11 months since he assumed leadership in June 2007: "All in all, we've seen very positive trends," Dykes told Mayor Peter Hughes and the council. "Things are moving in the right direction.

Dykes identified the challenges modern hospitals face, such as seven-figure equipment and expensive staff, which make it very difficult for hospitals to survive. About 10 acute-care hospitals have closed in the state since 2000, according to the New Jersey Hospital Association. The Rutgers Center for State Health Policy conducted a state-wide survey in October 2007, which found that about half of state residents are concerned about hospital closings and 77 percent are worried that remaining hospitals will not be able to cope with a natural disaster or other widespread emergency.

"It's a difficult environment for hospitals in New Jersey," Dykes

said. "Some of those difficulties will be exacerbated by the governor's budget cuts."

Anticipating a loss of more than \$200,000 in state aid for the 2008 budget, Glen Ridge is already wary of Governor Jon Corzine and his shrinking expenditures.

Dykes said that last year's charity services performed by the hospital were valued at more than \$6,000,000. He said that the state subsidized about \$2,000,000 of those services but that he expects future charitable giving to go unsubsidized.

Still, despite financial obstacles, Mountainside Hospital has managed to turn things around, according to Dykes. It has a new Board of Directors, 13 new departmental managers and 397 new employees. It is utilizing new technologies, such as a dual-source 128 slice Computerized Tomography (CT) scanner – the first in the area – and new information management systems.

With the addition of complimentary outpatient parking, the hospital has managed an increase of 9 percent in outpatient volume since last June. There has also been a 12 percent decrease in overall

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length of stay for inpatients.

"That's a huge improvement in quality," Dykes said.

What began with six beds in

1891 has become a 365-bed facility today. In addition to emergency medicine, the hospital offers maternity, cardiac care and other services. Outpatients now have access to radiology, physical and occupational therapy, pain management, and sleep disorder services, among others.

"We're one of only two centers in New Jersey that is recognized for excellence in bariatric surgery," Dykes said of the programs that deal with the causes, prevention and treatment of obesity.

Dykes said that the hospital holds an important place in the community as an employer of more than 1,700 workers, and pays \$1.2 million in taxes annually (20 percent of which goes directly to Glen Ridge Borough). He said that employees and guests support local small businesses, further fueling the Glen Ridge economy.

"Since January of this year, we have had 88 physicians show interest in being on staff," he said. "I think we have been able to establish an image in the past year that is very welcoming."

"We are favorably viewed by the public," Dykes added. "This is a community that expects high quality and high service."

