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Erie VA hospital to close ICU, convert ER into urgent-care center

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Area veterans soon won't have surgeries at Erie Veterans Affairs Medical Center or visit the hospital's emergency department.

The Erie VAMC will close its four-bed intensive care unit Sept. 17 and convert its emergency department into an urgent-care center that is closed each day from 8 p.m. to 8 a.m.

The hospital, 135 E. 38th St., also will stop performing inpatient surgeries at the facility, though it might start scheduling them at other Erie hospitals. Its 22-bed inpatient acute care unit will remain open.

"Let me be clear: This VAMC is not going anywhere," said Anthony Behm, D.O., Erie VAMC's chief of staff.

The hospital employs 730 people. All permanent employees affected by the changes will be redeployed to other departments, Behm said, though a couple of temporary workers might be dismissed.

Erie VAMC officials said they are making these changes to better meet the needs of their patients. The hospital serves veterans in northwestern Pennsylvania; Ashtabula County, Ohio; and Chautauqua County, N.Y.

Fewer of these veterans are scheduling inpatient surgeries at the hospital or using its ER, Behm said.

Patients who require complex surgeries or treatments have been transferred to VA hospitals in Pittsburgh, Cleveland or Buffalo, or are having them done in Erie at UPMC Hamot or Saint Vincent Health Center.

"At most we see one to two patients overnight in the ER ... and a few more earlier in the evening," Behm said. "And more than 95 percent of our surgeries are now done on an outpatient basis."

The ICU averages fewer than one patient a day, Behm added.

These changes come while Erie VAMC is in the middle of a \$37.5 million expansion and renovation project that expands its behavioral-health, primary care and outpatient surgery departments. The project is scheduled to be finished during the winter of 2014-15.

Veterans' demands are changing, Behm said. Older ones are receiving more health care at home, while younger ones are most in need of behavioral-health services.

"The demand is incredibly high among younger veterans for (post-traumatic stress disorder) services," Behm said. "It's the nature of the conflict in which they were involved."

Ron Fowle, a U.S. Navy veteran who served in the Korean War, understands the hospital needs to meet the needs of younger veterans.

But he said he is concerned that too many veterans will have to travel long distances for medical care.

"If you can't go to the VA in Erie, where are you going to go?" Fowle asked as he was walking into the local hospital. "Down to Pittsburgh? I've already made 30 trips down there since 1997-98."

Erie VA Medical Center Employees Protest Planned ED, ICU Closure

Written by Sabrina Rodak | September 12, 2012

Erie (Pa.) Veterans Affairs Medical Center union employees are holding a rally to protest the hospital's plan to close the emergency department and intensive care unit, according to an [Erie Times-News](#) report.

At the end of August the hospital [announced](#) it would close the ICU due to low patient volume, convert the ED into an urgent care center and end inpatient surgeries.

Erie VAMC employees who are members of the union SEIU Local 200United are rallying to urge the hospital to delay closing the ED and ICU until an independent review can determine the root cause of the closings. The employees oppose the closure because it could displace ED and ICU employees. They also claim there is a demand for ED services. While the hospital's ICU census has been down to nearly one patient a day, the ED treated a record 695 patients in August, according to the report.

Michael Adelman, MD, Erie VAMC director, said most ED patients come during the day and are not brought in by ambulance, and so could be treated at the urgent care center, according to the report. Dr. Adelman also said no permanent workers will be laid off, according to the report.