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Mt. Zion Hospital Proposal UCSF wants to reopen some operating rooms, 30 beds

Wednesday, November 15,
2000

San Francisco Chronicle
CHRONICLE SECTIONS

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San Francisco -- One year after winning the fight to close Mount Zion Medical Center to all but daytime surgeries and clinics, the University of California at San Francisco is asking state clearance to reopen some of the hospital's mothballed operating rooms and 30 of its beds.

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It is an ironic turn of events that comes just days before the first anniversary of the closure of Mount Zion's emergency room, which ended the venerable institution's 113-year mission as a community hospital.

UCSF administrators will unveil the proposal today at a meeting of the UC regents in Los Angeles. The turnabout was prompted by overbooking at the 22 operating rooms of UCSF Medical Center on Parnassus Heights, which was running below capacity at the time of the decision to shutter Mount Zion.

"For a host of reasons, we are busier than we have ever been before," said Mark Laret, chief executive of UCSF Medical Center.

In materials submitted before the regents meeting, UCSF acknowledged that in the past seven months, 360 patients referred to the medical center for surgery by doctors in California and Oregon were turned away for lack of a free operating room.

Those patients had their surgeries instead at Stanford Medical Center, the UC Davis Medical Center or at other competing hospitals.

Although it is a simple matter to unlock the doors and dust off the beds at Mount Zion, it will cost the university an estimated \$4 million to perform seismic upgrades required of a medical facility that cares for patients in beds overnight. The annual cost of staffing the reopened wing of Mount Zion is estimated to be \$3 million.

UCSF will formally request the funds at a meeting of the regents in January, and if approved, the hospital could be reoccupied as soon as state officials reinstate its acute-care license.

Laret described the reopening as a limited, stopgap measure to provide operating-room space for university surgeons while a three-year, \$18 million construction project to add four new operating rooms at Parnassus takes place.

"I would not use the term reopening, because it might create the impression we are backtracking on our commitment to improve the financial performance of UCSF hospitals," said Laret.

The bitterly contested decision to close Mount Zion, transforming the 365-bed hospital into a medical center offering cancer care and surgeries on a daytime basis only, was made in the midst of a financial crisis that caused the unraveling of UCSF Stanford Health Care, the star-crossed merger of UCSF hospitals with those of Stanford.

Mount Zion Hospital alone was said to be losing \$4 million per month, and required millions of dollars in earthquake-retrofitting costs to meet standards set for 2008.

Laret disclosed that during the first quarter ended Sept. 30, UCSF Medical Center posted a loss of \$2.6 million on revenues of \$130 million and that he anticipates a \$25 million loss for the

fiscal year. Those losses are within the projections of this year's business plan.

To cope with the current surge in patients seeking operating-room time, UCSF has also scheduled elective surgeries for Saturdays and has taken steps to shorten the stays of patients at the hospital. The university is also "evaluating" unspecified cuts in programs to increase capacity.

The use of operating rooms at Mount Zion would be limited to less complex procedures where the use of an intensive care unit is not necessary. If patients at Mount Zion encountered a problem requiring intensive care, they would be taken by ambulance to Parnassus.

Currently, several operating rooms in Mount Zion are used by the daytime surgical clinics. Laret said it will not be difficult to open two more for the overnight patients.

"It is a beautiful facility," he said.

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