Clifton-Fine Hospital Mitigation Plan for Inpatient and Swing-Bed Closure

Clifton-Fine Hospital (CFH) is actively pursuing a new Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) hospital designation, Rural Emergency Hospital. Clifton-fine hospital has identified any date after Feb. 1, 2024 for the decertification of 20 special use beds as currently defined on the operating certificate, based upon NYS DOH approval. The entire facility is not closing. All other current services, such as the 24/7 Emergency Department, Radiology, Laboratory, out-patient rehabilitation, primary care and more will continue to serve the community.

The majority of the hospital's service area includes the census tracts for Cranberry Lake (12927), Fine (13639), Newton Falls (13666) and Star Lake (13690). The hospital is located in Southern St. Lawrence County, a federally designated Healthcare Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) for primary care, dental health and mental health. Across every category of healthcare provider, St. Lawrence County has fewer providers per capita than the region and NYS. The service area is situated on the western side of the six million-acre Adirondack Park. While the service area is heavily forested and sparsely populated, it is greatly trafficked by vacationers and other visitors traveling through the Adirondacks making emergency service vital to this area.

Based upon 2023 inpatient and swing bed census data, the number of patients affected by the closure of inpatient beds was 52. As previous data supports, the disproportionate share of patients served at Clifton-Fine Hospital are outpatients. The out-patient service model will continue, and all outpatient services such as Emergency Department, Laboratory and Radiology services, Rehab and primary care will continue. The strategic decision by the CFH Board to convert to the REH model is supported by positive financial forecasts and will preserve healthcare in rural southern St. Lawrence County.

The Rural Health Redesign Center team analyzed data compiled for all zip codes listed above related to the hospital service area. These ZIP codes, along with correlated data for St. Lawrence County Community Health Assessment were assessed for impact to medically underserved populations in this rural county. Information was analyzed for these groups by reviewing income, race and ethnicity, language, age, gender, sexual orientation, vehicle status, number of households with and without insurance, and number of households underinsured, disability. Demographic data analysis would indicate that a significant portion of the population is aged 65+ and at or below poverty level. Transportation is a major barrier to healthcare as the next closest Critical Access Hospital is over 30 miles away, and larger community hospitals are 50 miles away. Therefore keeping CFH emergency and primary care services is vital to this rural community.

Attaining REH designation by CMS will allow for the continuation of vital emergency and outpatient services to be delivered to the community of St. Lawrence Count, with, as previously noted, no material impact on access to care. Protocols are currently in place for the transfer of patients requiring acute inpatient care, and patients requiring short term observation of medical status will continue to be cared for at CFH. Only swing bed patient requests will be deferred.