



Citizens for Healthy Community Hospitals

A Look At Important Issues

Continued Access To Quality Health Care

This is probably the most fundamental and important issue surrounding the sale of our local health care anchor. For 100 years, Audrain County has been served by a single hospital. It has existed under different names and different patterns of ownership, but at each stage, the existence of a local hospital has guaranteed that area residents have convenient and immediate access to life-saving care.

In emergency situations, like farm injuries, automobile accidents or heart attacks, minutes can make a difference. The existence of advanced emergency services, on-site surgery capabilities and reliable out-patient care capabilities is critical to the health of our communities. With the existence of a full-service modern hospital in a local setting, procedures and conditions that require ongoing treatment or in-patient care such as cancer treatment, obstetrics, general surgery, lab and imaging services, pain management and pulmonology can be accessed locally without the need for extensive travel or expensive out-of-town stays.

Older adults, working families and people with both physical and developmental disabilities benefit greatly from having such resources close to home. And so does everyone else. Last year, our hospital recorded 47,000 patient visits, our providers accounted for 122,000 visits and our clinics served nearly 22,000 patients – and that is in a single year.

The proposed sale of the existing hospital represents a new source of investment in our local health care capacity and does NOT signal the closure of an institution that has served this area for a century. Finding a compatible buyer who is willing to make such an investment over time is a prudent step forward at this time, particularly in light of the fact that the hospital is for sale.

Why An MU Health Care Connection Makes Sense

SSM Health has offered three of its Missouri hospitals for sale. When that announcement was made, multiple buyers stepped forward to express interest in purchasing those facilities. In the case of the St. Mary's – Audrain hospital, the only potential buyer located in the mid-Missouri area was MU Health Care. They have signed a Letter of Intent to purchase and operate the hospital and negotiations are underway. There are several advantages to being affiliated with the University of Missouri health system.

MU Health Care is close to us. Sometimes, referrals to other hospitals are required. For people in Audrain County and surrounding areas, having a world-class facility, in network, within 50 miles of home is a distinct advantage, particularly if the level of care exceeds our local capabilities or the treatments will require multiple visits over time.

MU Health Care is in strong financial condition. Last year, MU Health Care posted \$1 billion in revenues and realized an operating surplus of more than \$100 million. That gives them the financial firepower required to invest in smaller community hospitals while expanding their already robust medical network. Such financial stability puts MU Health Care in a strong position to be able to withstand changes in the larger health care market, including changes in Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement levels, changing patterns of insurance coverage and compliance with new regulations and technological advancements. It also allows Audrain Hospital and the people it serves to access technologies and medical expertise that would be too expensive to provide on a stand-alone basis in a small market.

MU Health Care knows the market. Right now, many Audrain County residents regularly utilize the services of the MU medical campus in Columbia. The MU Staff For Life Helicopter Service already serves this area. Many area residents are alumni of the University of Missouri and are comfortable with the culture of the institution and are familiar with the layout of the Columbia medical campus if referrals are required. And, it's close to home. An integrated system in mid-Missouri will provide increased local access to primary care, regional access to specialty services; and a larger network that can provide more advanced levels of care.

Job Retention and The Local Economy

Right now, Audrain hospital is among the largest employers in Audrain County, with more than 450 employees. MU Health Care has indicated that as discussions go forward regarding the sale of the hospital, the retention of physicians and employees will be at the forefront of all discussions and decisions.

Employees will have increased access to a wide range of opportunities for jobs, growth and advancement within the MU Health Care organization across mid-Missouri and that employee retention will be prioritized. The investment in the existing hospital in this location means that staffing will be required on a local basis to keep the hospital running efficiently on a daily basis. Those jobs are key to our local economy. Not only do those jobs provide an income for individual families, but the multiplier effect of those incomes is important to the overall economic base of our community. All sorts of businesses from retail to service industries rely on a healthy local economy fueled by good paying jobs to succeed.

Our community has seen the effect that large layoffs or plant closures can have on our local economy when we lost the brick plants years ago. This is our opportunity as citizens to support reinvestment in our local health care industry and to partner with an entity that has proven financial and quality health care delivery capabilities.

Economic Development and Recruitment

When we talk about hospital employment and recruitment, we often think of doctors and nurses. Locally, however, we are actively engaged in the continual recruitment of other companies across a broad range of industries. When those companies look at our community, the questions they have are often the same: "Do you have good schools? Do you have a well-trained workforce? What is the local standard of living? And...Do you have access to quality medical care? Having a modern, quality hospital in Mexico helps us attract new companies that can provide diverse job opportunities across industries and helps us attract professional talent within the medical industry who can call Audrain County home.