

Hospital to lay off 24 workers

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Englewood Hospital and Medical Center is laying off 24 employees, reducing hours for five other staffers and leaving 22 open positions unfilled in a restructuring to stabilize finances, hospital officials confirmed Monday.

"This decision has been reviewed very carefully to ensure that the restructuring does not impact our ability to continue to deliver quality patient care," said Douglas Duchak, the hospital's president.

The layoffs are taking place "across the board" to offset recent declines in patient volume — which occurred after an initial boost in patients that followed the closing of Pascack Valley Hospital in Westwood two years ago, spokeswoman Maria Margiotta said.

"The difficulties we continue to face in this industry, including declining patient volumes, a rise in uninsured patients and inadequate funding for charity care, Medicare and Medicaid, forces us to make adjustments in how we operate," Duchak said.

The 520-bed Englewood Hospital has 2,684 employees and more than 800 doctors. Despite the layoffs, Englewood still will have 100 more employees than it had two years ago, Margiotta said.

Statewide, hospitals have experienced significant financial losses during the recession and 45 percent had to lay off employees last year, according to a survey of hospitals released earlier this year. An additional 21 percent anticipated layoffs this year, including Hackensack University Medical Center, which announced the elimination of up to 125 positions in September.

The shuttering of Pascack Valley increased patient volume at Englewood by 2,006 over two years — and helped bring the hospital into the black after a string of loses, according hospital officials. In September, the hospital dedicated the \$35 million two-story Kaplen Pavilion, which includes an emergency department that's triple the size of the previous treatment area, a project funded through an ongoing capital campaign.

But this year, "the patient volume in 2009 is not the same as it was in 2008," Margiotta said, declining to provide data before year-end figures are available. "We've had a loss for the first nine months of 2009 and we're trying to narrow the loss," Margiotta said.

Patient volume at Englewood is a significant factor in the battle over reopening another hospital in Westwood. Englewood and The Valley Hospital in Ridgewood object to Hackensack University Medical Center's plan to open a 128-bed full-service hospital in Westwood, claiming there are already too many hospital beds in Bergen County. Another hospital could result in even greater losses in patient volume at Englewood, the hospital's officials said Monday.

"This amplifies our position," Margiotta said.

A spokeswoman for the union that represents 700 nurses at Englewood described the layoff announcement "as a real surprise."

Jeanne Otersen of the Emerson-based Health Professionals and Allied Employees said the union will challenge the need for layoffs. She said it was unclear if any union members will lose their jobs.

"We don't understand the need for layoffs," Otersen said. "In terms of the emergency department, we see volume going up," she said.

The nurses were off the job and walking the picket line for two weeks in June after contract negotiations failed. The two sides eventually agreed to a three-year contract in which hospital officials agreed to add nine full-time positions effective next year, the union said in June. Nurses also received a 1 percent raise in September and are scheduled for the same next year. In 2011, nurses will receive a 2 percent increase, plus annual 1 percent to 1 1/2 percent increases for each year served.

Margiotta said a meeting is scheduled Thursday with representatives of the union.

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