

Takeover proposal halves USPHS Hospital capacity

By ANEMONA HARTOCOLLIS

The U.S. Public Health Service Hospital is expected to lose half of its inpatient capacity, going from the current 407 beds to 204 beds, under a plan that would convert the hospital from a federal to a voluntary facility.

St. Vincent's Medical Center, which is formulating the plan to convert the hospital in Clifton, released the first details of its proposal yesterday. Only 10 days remain before the Aug. 14 deadline for the plan's submission to the federal government.

Under the proposal, the hospital would be operated by a new corporate entity, with its own board of directors. But the hospital ultimately would be responsible to the Sisters of Charity of New York, a private non-profit agency that oversees St. Vincent's in West Brighton as well as hospitals in Manhattan, Westchester and Yonkers.

Financing is the most problematic aspect of the takeover by the Sisters of Charity, according to Eric Feldmann, a spokesman for St. Vincent's. He said Clifton facility, whose expenses have been entirely covered by the federal government, would "inevitably" lose money after the conversion.

Financial details were not available yesterday, but Feldmann said the proposal includes a discussion of possible sources of government funding to help underwrite the expected operating deficit.

The Clifton hospital is being trimmed in size because it will no longer be responsible to dependents of the U.S. Defense Department — primarily seamen — whom it was founded to serve.

It will continue to serve the

North Shore of Staten Island, where a large portion of the population is elderly or poor. The financial strain on the hospital is predicted in part because so many patients lack health insurance or rely on Medicaid and Medicare.

The 204 beds proposed for the converted hospital include 160 medical/surgical beds, 25 acute-care psychiatric beds, 14 beds for mentally retarded residents of the Staten Island Developmental Center in Willowbrook and five beds for inmates of the Arthur Kill Correctional Facility, Charleston.

The proposal deletes only two of the medical services now available at the Clifton hospital, cobalt therapy and cardiac catheterization. Renal dialysis for kidney patients, a service that other hospitals in the borough had said they could not replace if it were discontinued, will still be provided after the planned conversion.

Feldmann said "efforts will be made to continue" the hospital's alcohol detoxification program and its cancer support program.

St. Vincent's offered to hire consultants to devise the plan on June 30, after it became clear that Congress would otherwise close the hospital as requested by President Reagan, who considers the nation's Public Health Service (PHS) system underutilized.

Officials at St. Vincent's said programmatic, architectural and financial analysts were rushing to save the hospital by condensing work on the proposal that normally would take four to six months into six weeks.

St. Vincent's was motivated to submit the proposal to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services because it serves the same North Shore constituency as PHS hospital. Already treating 78,000 patients annually, St. Vincent's feared that it could not cope with the additional 60,000 outpatient and 45,000 emergency patient visits it would receive if the PHS hospital shut down.

As operated by the Sisters of Charity, the converted PHS hospital is intended to adhere to the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church, although the community and other voluntary hospitals on Staten Island will be invited to nominate members of the board of directors.

The PHS hospital has not yet laid off any employees, but Andrew Passeri, the hospital's deputy director, said yesterday, "I suppose that will be done." Passeri said staff changes, if any, would be made in accordance with federal civil service regulations on hiring, firing and transferring.

St. Vincent's, with 426 beds, currently runs a \$249,000 deficit on an annual budget of \$55 million, according to Feldmann. The PHS hospital currently operates on an annual budget of \$31 million, a figure that would change radically if the hospital were part of the civilian sector, Passeri said.