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VCU Health System to operate Children's Hospital



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Children's Hospital will continue operations on Brook Road, where it has been located since 1928.

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The VCU Health System will assume operations of the Children's Hospital of Richmond July 1 if negotiations under way go as planned.

The approximately 300 employees of the small, specialty children's hospital at 2924 Brook Road in Richmond's North Side will become VCU Health System employees in the arrangement.

"We will be a children's hospital operating under the umbrella of the VCU Health System," said Leslie G. Wyatt, chief executive officer and president of Children's Hospital.

Governing boards of both organizations have approved the proposal in concept, said Wyatt and John Duval of VCU, with final approval still pending.

Employees of both organizations are being told in meetings today.

This is not the first time the two have talked about joint operations.

In November 2005, the VCU Health System and the Children's Hospital announced plans to jointly build a 75- to 100-bed children's hospital on the VCU medical campus.

Those plans were called off in March 2007. The parties said the project had become unaffordable, rising to a projected \$200 million costs from an original projected cost of \$140 million. In that plan, Children's Hospital would have built and owned the facility, and the VCU Health System would have operated it.

"I am not sure we ever stopped talking," said Duval, chief executive officer of MCV Hospitals. "With the arrival of Dr. Bruce Rubin as the new chair (of VCU pediatrics), he really has engaged such a broad swath of the community. He has brought a focus in terms of the type of peoples and specialties we recruit in. Out of that grew a re-energizing of our dialogue."

Rubin became pediatrics chair July 1, 2009.

There were also discussions in 2002 between VCU Health System, Bon Secours Richmond Health System and Children's Hospital about building a free-standing, full-service children's hospital.

"Our focus this time is not on bricks and mortar, it's on people," said Wyatt, of Children's Hospital.

"It a practical solution to advancing pediatric health care," she said.

Wyatt said economics are a factor, but "It's not driven by that."

"The beauty of this combination is that we have positioned ourselves very intentionally over the last five to 10 years to be very focused on post-acute services and not acute services," said Wyatt. "So we very complimentary to the services downtown and not duplicative."

Virginia Health Information Industry Reports show the not-for-profit Children's Hospital ended the 2007-08 fiscal year with \$1,309,091 in excess revenue over expenses. The report shows the hospital's net worth for that period as \$124,504,893. The hospital's total assets for that period were valued at \$131 million. Liabilities — current and long-term— totaled about \$7 million.

"We remain committed to preserving services here at the Brook Road site for the time being," said Duval. "For the time being, children's service will be a two-campus operation." Longer-term plans will be decided during strategic planning, he said.

Children's Hospital sits on 14 acres in North Side, on property separate from additional acreage controlled by the Children's Hospital Foundation.

The original Children's Hospital building is more than 80 years old, and over the years, additions have

expanded the space for clinical services.

Hospital history dates the beginnings to 1917 when Dr. William Tate Graham opened a free clinic in the basement of his office on Franklin Street. Visiting nurses brought children crippled by polio to him for care. In 1920, fundraisers were held to support a Crippled Children's Hospital, which operated out of two wards in facilities at the Medical College of Virginia. A \$500,000 donation from Sallie May Dooley funded the facility on Brook Road, which opened in 1928.

The merger also supports VCU's teaching hospital and research functions, providing opportunities for medical residents to train and researchers to develop and improve upon current care standards.

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