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MEMORANDUM

To: Common Council – City Clerk
From: Dave Gelting, Legislative Fiscal Analyst – Lead
Date: December 4, 2024
Subject: Impact of Planned Service Reduction at St. Joseph's Hospital

On November 14, 2024, Ascension Wisconsin announced that, among other changes to its health care system, the cardiac catheterization (cath) labs at St. Joseph Hospital (SJH) and St. Francis Hospital (SFH) will be closed, and 24 hours per day / 7 days per week (24/7) cath lab services will be initiated at Franklin Hospital. SJH is located at 5000 West Chambers Street in Milwaukee, SFH is located at 3237 South 16th Street in Milwaukee, and Franklin Hospital is located at 10101 South 27th Street in Franklin. Cath lab services include opening blockages from a clogged blood vessel in the heart, which is a frequent cause of both STEMIs (major heart attacks) and cardiac arrests.

Timely treatment of STEMIs is important - until the blockage is removed, the heart is progressively dying. Evidence shows that for STEMI patients, every 30 minutes in delay to arriving to a cath lab results in a 7.5% increase in mortality.¹

The closure of the cath lab at SJH will inevitably lead to an increase in the time it takes to receive STEMI treatment for some Milwaukee residents in the northern portion of the city. The Milwaukee County Office of Emergency Management – Emergency Medical Services Division (OEM-EMS) estimates that some impacted residents could see their drive time increase by as much as 8 minutes.

The closure of the SFH cath lab will be much less impactful in this respect than that of SJH due to the fact that the Milwaukee County Office of OEM-EMS does not include SFH in the operational policy for emergency STEMI hospital destinations, because the SFH lab was not available 24/7.² The initiation of 24/7 cath lab services at Franklin Hospital is anticipated to make that facility an available destination for EMS providers transporting STEMI patients.

¹ Giuseppe De Luca, et al, Time Delay to Treatment and Mortality in Primary Angioplasty for Acute Myocardial Infarction, The American Heart Association, 2004, <https://www.ahajournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1161/01.CIR.000121424.76486.20>

² Some area hospitals maintain cath labs but do not operate them 24-hours per day. The OEM-EMS policy directs EMS providers to locations suitable for 24/7/365 emergency STEMI care.

As of June 1, 2024, the OEM-EMS operational policy for STEMI emergencies directs EMS providers to the following facilities:³

- Ascension - All Saint's Racine, 3801 Spring Street, Racine
- Ascension - Elmbrook, 19333 W North Avenue, Brookfield
- Ascension - St. Joseph, 5000 W Chambers Street, Milwaukee
- Ascension - St. Mary's, 2301 N Lake Drive, Milwaukee
- Aurora - Grafton, 975 Port Washington Rd, Grafton
- Aurora - St. Luke's Medical Center, 2900 West Oklahoma Ave, Milwaukee
- Children's Hospital of Wisconsin, 8915 West Connell Ct, Wauwatosa
- Froedtert Hospital, 9200 W Wisconsin Ave, Wauwatosa

While SJH is about three miles (14-minute drive) from Froedtert Hospital to the southwest, and about five miles (18-minute drive) from Columbia St. Mary's to the southeast,⁴ there are not any nearby facilities with cath labs to the north of St. Joseph Hospital.

The Milwaukee Fire Department (MFD) reports that, from an EMS perspective, the closure of the SJH cath lab will impact approximately 70 STEMI patients and 170 post cardiac arrest patients per year. OEM-EMS reports that, as a result of this change, 100,052 residents in the City of Milwaukee will no longer be within a 15-minute drive of a cath lab, 74% of whom are Black. This impacted geographic area is shown in purple in Figure 1.⁵

Without the anticipated closure of the SJH cath lab, OEM-EMS reports that 5% of the city of Milwaukee population (28,523 of 573,549) is not within a 15-minute drive of a cath lab, and that 67% of those Milwaukee residents are Black, 17% are White, 8% are Asian, and 5% are Hispanic or Latino.

After the anticipated closure of the SJH cath lab, OEM-EMS reports that 22% of the city of Milwaukee population (128,575 of 573,549) will not be within a 15-minute drive of a cath lab. Of these individuals, 72% are Black, 13% are White, 6% are Asian, and 6% are Hispanic or Latino.

³ OEM-EMS Hospital Destination and Transport Operational Policy, Reviewed-Revised 6/1/2024, accessed 12/3/2024, <https://county.milwaukee.gov/files/county/emergency-management/EMS-Standards-of-Care/Hospital-Destination-and-Transport-2024.pdf#page=3>

⁴ Distance is the straight-line distance, and drive times are estimated based on Google Maps driving direction data.

⁵ Figure produced by Milwaukee County Office of Emergency Management, December 3, 2024.

Other planned changes to Milwaukee-area Ascension health care facilities include:⁶

- Transitioning “birthing services,” or labor and delivery services, from Columbia St. Mary’s-Ozaukee and Elmbrook Hospital in Brookfield to
 - St. Joseph Hospital in Milwaukee
 - Columbia St. Mary’s - Milwaukee campus
 - All Saints Hospital - Racine
- Centralizing all Ascension inpatient behavioral health care services for the southeast portion of the state at St. Francis Hospital in Milwaukee.
 - Eventually close its inpatient behavioral health units at
 - All Saints Hospital - Racine
 - Columbia St. Mary’s Hospital-Ozaukee
 - Expanding the inpatient behavioral health center at St. Francis Hospital through a \$10 million investment. The goal is to have up to 60 inpatient beds at that facility.

In 2018, Ascension Wisconsin had proposed closing the surgical and medical units at SJH.⁷ This resulted in an outcry from local elected representatives and community groups, and ultimately Ascension agreed to delay the changes indefinitely. In the year following the decision to delay the changes, Ascension Wisconsin undertook a series of meetings with community leaders. The process included 161 interviews with individuals and community organizations, 27 stakeholder meetings, a Community Health Needs Assessment and seven community conversations.⁸

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⁶ Becker’s Hospital CFO Report “Ascension trims services in Wisconsin: 6 things to know” November 15, 2024 <https://www.beckershospitalreview.com/finance/ascension-trims-services-in-wisconsin-6-things-to-know.html>

⁷ Milwaukee Journal Sentinel “Ascension Wisconsin cutting services at St. Joseph Hospital” April 5, 2018 <https://www.jsonline.com/story/money/business/health-care/2018/04/05/ascension-wisconsin-reduce-services-st-joseph-hospital-part-broader-long-term-plan/488523002/>

⁸ Milwaukee Neighborhood News Service “What you need to know about the St. Joseph Hospital controversy” April 26, 2019 <https://milwaukeeenns.org/2019/04/26/what-you-need-to-know-about-the-st-joseph-hospital-controversy/>

Figure 1: 15-minute Drive Time Radius to Milwaukee-Area Cath Labs

