

## **Why I Am Disappointed with OSF HealthCare**

A little over a year ago OSF Healthcare announced their plans to build a new inpatient hospital in Ottawa. Initially that sounded great but it quickly became clear their intentions were to eliminate numerous services in Ottawa and provide those services on the Peru campus. The extent of those changes have not been clearly communicated to the community or even many of the health care providers in the community.

To summarize, hospital beds will be reduced from 48 in use today to 12 or 20 (OSF has never modified their request to reflect the higher number that they now talk about) and the following services will be eliminated: ICU services (5 beds), newborn nursery services, inpatient obstetrical services, 90% of inpatient surgery (5 ORs to 2 ORs), inpatient dialysis (kidney) services, after hours and weekend surgeries, and orthopedic procedures requiring the MAKO robot.

OSF leaders tried to point out the importance of outpatient services, but despite that the following changes to outpatient services will occur: 20% reduction in outpatient surgeries, eliminate after hours/weekend GI services, Advanced Breast Ultrasound (ABUS) to be done in Peru, no on-site radiologists (patients will not be able to get biopsies done or concerning nodules on CT scan or ultrasound images and women will not be able to get a breast biopsy done in Ottawa) and limited on-site anesthesiologists (certain procedures requiring sedation may not be able to be done in Ottawa). There are other outpatient services that OSF has remained noncommittal regarding whether they will be continued in Ottawa or moved to Peru.

If you understand the current healthcare climate and the challenges healthcare organizations face, some of the attempts to regionalize or consolidate services do make some sense. However, I am concerned that the above changes are too drastic for the most populous portion of LaSalle County and at best will result in some increased unnecessary patient transfers. At worst there could be a negative impact on the quality of care provided in Ottawa. Now you would think that this is the reason I am disappointed with OSF Healthcare, but it is not.

In any relationship, whether it be business or personal like a marriage, the keystone of success is the commitment of the interested parties to each other. Healthcare is no different. Communities need healthcare organizations to provide quality care and healthcare organizations need communities to utilize their services in order to be able to continue those services.

In order for parties to remain committed they must actively listen, communicate well and be willing to adapt or change. In short, they must be willing to negotiate in order to achieve a mutually beneficial result. Failure to listen, communicate and negotiate threatens that commitment and puts the relationship at risk for failure.

Since the announcement of OSF's plan for our community and the local region, it seems OSF has taken a one-sided approach and is solely focused on their plan. They claim to be the experts in healthcare and understand rural healthcare. While I don't disagree with that, I do

question if they truly understand the dynamics and needs of the rural communities in eastern LaSalle County that they serve.

When OSF has been asked if they are still committed to Ottawa, they have cited their plan to build a new hospital facility. That plan has now been deferred for a year and one OSF official indicated to the Illinois Health Facilities and Services Review Board (HFSRB) that they will have to look at finances again to decide if they will still proceed with a new hospital facility in Ottawa.

Communication has been poor. The initial announcement they made about building a new inpatient hospital was very misleading to the general public. There was no significant advance notice provided to the city of the OSF plans. They have said they didn't want parts of the plan leaking out causing concerns for their employees, but that is what non-disclosure agreements are for. Their attempts to explain their plan focused on the plight of rural healthcare nationally and locally. The challenges in rural healthcare typically involve hospitals that are not financially viable (like the hospitals in Streator, Peru and Spring Valley). That is not the case for the hospital in Ottawa as it is financially profitable. For the past year the City of Ottawa has requested an upper-level executive from OSF Healthcare be present during discussions. No upper-level executive has attended until the HFSRB is now requiring OSF to provide monthly reports on progress made with the City of Ottawa and community leaders. The only communication with the community about the plan to close the ICU and OB unit in Ottawa in August was a one inch classified ad in The Times. This meets regulations requiring notification. I believe the community deserves to clearly hear from OSF what the plans for closure of those units are as well as any other services they plan to discontinue in Ottawa and move to Peru. A classified ad falls well short of that mark.

OSF did finally meet on a regular basis with the City of Ottawa and community leaders starting last fall. Again, this only occurred after the chairman of the HFSRB strongly advised OSF to resolve the impasse with the city so the community can get the care they deserve. OSF listened and responded to multiple questions, but not always with clear answers. I don't think they actively listened (tried to really understand the community's concerns). They questioned the relevance of some of the questions asked, even when it involved quality of care provided within the OSF system. This argumentative approach rarely helps negotiating efforts. A proposal by the city that left intact efforts to consolidate some services but increase the number of beds and add a third operating room was not accepted by OSF. OSF has clearly communicated to the City of Ottawa and community leaders that they were not negotiating and they confirmed this at the last meeting with the HFSRB.

That is the problem. Failure to negotiate is different from failing to reach a negotiated agreement. Failure to negotiate indicates that OSF has no interest in City or community concerns. Their commitment to the community is certainly suspect. For an organization that frequently stresses the importance of the patient experience to their leaders and employees it amazes me that they seem so uninterested in reaching a resolution that addresses the concerns with this plan. This is my biggest disappointment with OSF. I expected more from the organization I was once very proud to work for.

So, what can you do? First of all, there will be a community hearing hosted by the HFSRB at Central School on June 10 at 4pm. If you would like to express your opposition to the OSF plan please attend. Even if you don't want to speak, please consider attending to show your opposition to this plan. The larger the crowd the larger the impact will be.

Second, the HFSRB will vote on the OSF proposal to eliminate OB and ICU services in Ottawa on August 12, 2025 at 9am in East Peoria, IL. The Citizens for HealthCare Ottawa will voice their opposition to the plan. Community members can also speak if they register prior to the hearing.

Finally, like any other business that provides a product or service, success hinges on people liking and using that product or service. If it is not utilized and the company wants to succeed, they will adapt and make changes to meet the needs of their clients. It is no different with OSF. The OSF plan depends on utilization of the services in Peru by the majority of their patients in Ottawa and eastern LaSalle County. I know OSF believes that the opposition and noise about this plan will die down and people will go to Peru. Maybe they are right. However, they have been very surprised with the significant opposition to their plan and maybe they will be wrong about how the community responds to moving services to Peru.

If the community is going to make a statement, we need to continue to utilize OSF facilities and services in Ottawa. This supports the desire to have quality healthcare in our community as well as supporting our local healthcare providers and employees. However, if services are recommended that are no longer provided in Ottawa but are provided in Peru, you have a choice. You can choose to tell your healthcare provider you will not utilize services in Peru and will go to another healthcare system. The provider offices and emergency room can still make those referrals and transfers. It may require a little more effort on their part but it can be done. To help make those decisions a little more straightforward a spreadsheet listing quality rankings of hospitals within 60 miles of Ottawa is available on the Citizens for Healthcare Ottawa website (<https://saveottawahealthcare.com/resources/>). This option will not work for everyone. Some will have insurance restrictions on where they can go. Some will have transportation issues. You should go wherever you have to in order to get the care you need. If significant numbers of patients "Say No to the Peru Campus", it is likely to catch the attention of OSF. This should also not be construed as a negative to the LaSalle/Peru/Spring Valley communities. They deserve a hospital just as much as Ottawa does.

All this could be avoided if OSF would choose to sit down with the City of Ottawa and community leaders and work on coming up with a solution that can work for all. This will require OSF to recommit to Ottawa and that is a decision that only OSF can make and communicate to the community.

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