Tuesday, June 29, 2010

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Proposal sparks health-care controversy
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Too much health care or not enough choice? That is the question facing Danville-area residents who have been asked to weigh in on Centra Health's proposal to build a 27,000-square-foot ambulatory surgery center. Depending on how it's viewed, the surgery center either would compete with or supplement the services of Danville Regional Medical Center.

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Centra Ambulatory Surgery LLC filed for a Virginia Certificate of Public Need (COPN) with the State Department of Health in January. A COPN must be obtained before new health-care projects are begun. Officials at Danville Regional and Memorial Hospital of Martinsville and Henry County quickly announced their intentions to object to the application.

As a result, the state health commissioner's office is inviting local residents to comment on the issue before May 29. As state officials deliberate the merits of the application, residents' letters and e-mails will be considered along with state criteria, including patient accessibility and financial feasibility.

Dr. Chalmers Nunn, senior vice president and chief medical officer of Lynchburg-based Centra Health, says his organization decided to build the surgery center after hearing from Danville physicians concerned that a large number of patients were seeking treatment elsewhere because of dissatisfaction with Danville Regional. Centra backed up its case with figures from Virginia Health Information Annual Licensure Survey Data showing declining usage of Danville Regional's operating rooms and emergency department since 2004.

In a statement, Danville Regional said the COPN would be "unnecessary and wasteful" because of a surplus of operating rooms of the planning district. The hospital expects job losses and service cutbacks to result from the surgery center because it could take a high percentage of paying patients from Danville Regional.

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