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## Grady Hospital sends suburbs a bill

By **CRAIG SCHNEIDER**  
The Atlanta Journal-Constitution  
Published on: 07/11/07

When William Loughrey stepped before the Cobb County commissioners Tuesday, he saw himself as a kind of bill collector.

[Post comments below.]



Charlotte Teagle/Staff

(ENLARGE)

Grady Memorial Hospital officials hope suburban money will enhance support received from Fulton and DeKalb counties.

The county, he told Cobb officials, owes Grady Memorial Hospital more than \$4 million for 2006.

Loughrey is a member of the board that governs Grady and he told the commission Cobb should pay for care the hospital has provided poor and uninsured people from Cobb.

"Basically I wanted to let them know they are getting a lot of free care out of Grady, and they're not making their fair contribution," Loughrey said after the meeting.

He acknowledged that his trip to Cobb was not sanctioned by the Grady board. Nonetheless, he plans to visit county commissions in Gwinnett, Clayton and Henry counties this summer to make similar appeals.

Loughrey's visit and appeal for cash highlighted the increasing desperation on the part of hospital officials staring down the prospect of further financial ruin. They are seeking more ways to save and make money for Grady.

After the Cobb meeting, Commission Chairman Sam Olens dismissed the suggestion that Cobb needs to pay Grady.

Olens said Cobb's two hospitals — Wellstar Cobb General and Wellstar Kennestone — probably treat as many patients from DeKalb and Fulton counties as Grady treats from Cobb.

"Our hospitals are losing tens of millions and they're not billing other counties," Olens said.

Olens' reaction may be a sign of future battles ahead should the hospital pressure suburban counties for money.

Now, Fulton and DeKalb are the only counties that directly support Grady. Loughrey and others believe other metro counties need to start contributing, since many of their poor and uninsured use Grady.

But some of the community leaders being pulled into the debate over the future of the financially ailing hospital said Loughrey's outing is mostly a distraction. They say support from other counties would not solve all of Grady's problems.

Last year, Grady's shortfall was \$67 million.

"Grady and the surrounding counties need to 'true up' uninsured patient payments for fairness, but this will not alone materially affect the financial crisis," said a Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce report on Grady's financial picture.

The chamber is scheduled to release a final report Friday on what it says is the major issue — changing the hospital's governance to help make its finances sounder.

Hospital administrators announced Monday they will hire a consultant to improve efficiency.

The metro chamber said the hospital needs a \$120 million loan to survive in the short term. It needs to increase revenues by about \$50 million annually and spend about \$250 million to upgrade equipment, the chamber report recommends.

Loughrey's issue is muddled by the uncertainty and variety of numbers used by supporters and detractors on how much Grady spends on care for residents of suburban counties, vs. the care the hospitals in these counties provide for the poor of Fulton and DeKalb.

Loughrey used numbers placing care provided to Cobb residents at about \$4.2 million a year.

The Grady board is planning its own campaign to work with other metro counties. The Grady board is compiling figures on Grady's contribution to health care for the region's poor. Board members plan to send letters to the counties to start a dialogue, said board Chairwoman Pam Stephenson, a Democratic state representative from Atlanta.

Loughrey said Grady can't afford to wait.

"The reality is we are going to run out of money this fall," he said.

Stephenson, the head of the Grady board, said she believes metro counties need to support Grady, but she's also concerned such discussions could drag on until it's too late for the hospital.

### Comments

By Post

Jul 11, 2007 9:28 AM | [Link to this](#)

I worked at Grady and in our department only about 5-10% of the patients were non-citizens. To say the problem of uninsured and underinsured only affects non-citizens is short sighted. Grady treats Atlanta's poor. Bottom line.

By John Galt

Jul 11, 2007 9:27 AM | [Link to this](#)

Isn't it really the individual that owes? My county is not responsible for any other debts I generate. Why health care?

By Rando

Jul 11, 2007 9:27 AM | [Link to this](#)

I was uninsured and had heart disease in 2004. Went to Wellstar on Austell Road, then to St. Joseph's. Total cost to you taxpayers to save my life: over \$250,000, which included a new valve and a pacemaker. I am a white male, 48 at the time. So I'm no one to talk about people getting free medical care. But without it, I would be dead.

I was finally (two years later) able to obtain employment and therefore insurance. You can be sure I am now paying (gladly) for my health

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insurance, including long term disability and for assisted living, if I need it. I'm now trying to ensure I never have to ask for that kind of charity again.

But to all taxpayers who read this: Thank you. I owe you my life.

By Rick in Lawrenceville

Jul 11, 2007 8:56 AM | [Link to this](#)

Bills for illegal aliens should be sent to the federal government to let them know some of the true costs of illegal aliens on the local level!

By Hume

Jul 11, 2007 8:40 AM | [Link to this](#)

If admissions are done for all the patients and an address is provided, then all metro county hospitals should compare notes and then pay accordingly. If there is a disparity it would come out at that time.

I wonder how many of the patients treated are illegal aliens?

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