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## Doctors rescue details emerge

**SAN PABLO: Complicated financial plan, if approved, would keep hospital afloat**

By Ryan Huff

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Contra Costa County officials offered more details Tuesday on a complex plan that would provide at least \$4 million to Doctors Medical Center by the first week of November and allow the bankrupt San Pablo hospital to stay afloat.

Absent such a plan, the hospital likely will close and leave West County without a major emergency room or obstetrics facility, said Dr. William Walker, the county's health services director.

"The hospital is currently on life support," Walker said during a county Board of Supervisors meeting Tuesday. "If the county did nothing, it's my belief the hospital would close in November."

The county intends to sign a joint-powers agreement with the West Contra Costa Healthcare District, which owns the hospital. The county would transfer up to \$10 million to the state, which would match that amount with federal funds and release it in phases to the health care district.

In a separate transaction, the district would reallocate to the county future property tax proceeds in an amount equal to the county transfer.

County general fund money would not be at risk, Walker said.

The county, the health care district, a bankruptcy court judge and the California Medical Assistance Commission all must sign off on the plan before the hospital can receive a cash infusion.

County supervisors will vote on the joint-powers agreement next week or Oct. 31. A judge and the district are expected to approve the plan before a CMAC vote Nov. 2.

"I can't think of any obstacles," Walker said.

But that didn't stop county supervisors from asking detailed questions Tuesday about financial liability from such a deal.

Supervisor Gayle Uilkema of Lafayette asked whether the county would be responsible for paying any portion of a seismic upgrade Doctors Medical Center will need before 2015 to comply with state law.

Walker assured county supervisors that the joint-powers authority would strictly be a management agreement in which the county has majority rule but does not take on financial risks.

Employees at Doctors would continue working for the West County district, not the county, health officials said.

The hospital filed for bankruptcy Oct. 1. Doctors has downsized drastically in the past few weeks, planning to issue more than 300 layoff notices, closing its obstetrics unit and pulling out of the Pinole satellite campus.

Doctors also has diverted ambulances from its emergency room, creating a larger burden for nearby hospitals. In the past month, Kaiser's Richmond campus has averaged 18 ambulance transports from West County -- double its normal traffic, according to health department statistics.

The San Pablo hospital has reduced the hours or issued layoff notices to at least 151 workers and cut the wages of remaining employees across the board by 10 percent. If a joint-powers authority is formed, it is unclear whether workers' salaries would be restored, hospital spokeswoman Gisela Hernandez said.

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