

Dade City Hospital to Stop Delivering Babies
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By Gary Hatrick
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Pasco Regional Medical Center announced Thursday that the hospital will no longer deliver babies as of Sept. 1.

Shauna McKinnon, the hospital's chief executive officer, said that the declining number of births, an aging community, increasing medical costs and medical malpractice premiums led to the plan to close the hospital's obstetrical unit.

It was a difficult decision, McKinnon said, "But we had to make a difficult business decision in order to secure a more sustainable future for the hospital to continue to provide quality healthcare in Pasco County for generations."

A 33 percent decline in births from 2008 to 2012 was a factor in the decision. The hospital delivered about 300 babies per year before that number started declining in 2008.

"Births are on a decline nationally," McKinnon said. "A small community like Dade City is no different. They're just hit a little harder and two providers make that struggle a bit greater." Florida Hospital Zephyrhills will continue to provide obstetrical services.

The hospital has already started informing expectant mothers who have been under its care about the change. The hospital will continue delivering babies until Sept. 1.

The only service being discontinued is the actual delivery of the baby and the care following birth. Obstetrics and gynecology services along with surgical services will continue.

Area mothers-to-be have several choices including Florida Hospital Zephyrhills, recently opened Florida Hospital Wesley Chapel or Spring Hill Regional Hospital. Pasco Regional will advise mothers according to where they live along with the recommendation of their physician. The Dade City hospital's only obstetrician, Dr. Michael Weiss, is only authorized to deliver at Florida Hospital Zephyrhills.

McKinnon said the decision to close the obstetrical unit was discussed for a long time. When she presented the plan to the board of trustees, which is comprised of several local leaders whose children were born at the hospital, they asked a lot of questions, McKinnon said. But, she said, in the end they were supportive.

The board understood the need, McKinnon said. "What we heard resoundingly was: "It's sad but it makes sense," she said.

"I don't expect all positive responses, but I'm completely ready to explain to the community why we had to come to this point in our health care endeavors. We will shift gears to be able

to meet the other demands that are really in our community. We want to be a viable player in the community,” McKinnon added.

John Moors, executive director of the Greater Dade City Chamber of Commerce, said that health care providers all over the country have been required to make challenging decisions.

“My understanding is this is a business decision,” Moors said. “I’m sure it was one of the most agonizing decisions like those that are being made every day in the health care industry.”

Moors said that he was thankful that there still is a birth provider in the area and added that the chamber was very supportive of the hospital and expected that they would continue to provide excellent service to the community.

After the unit closes, other options for expansion of services, including building renovations, will begin. The hospital plans a state-of-the-art intensive care unit and Orthopedic Joint Center which includes specialization in minimally-invasive surgery that is needed as the population continues to age.

She said in the past five years, \$12.3 million has been invested in the hospital.

“We’re going to continue to provide quality, safe care,” McKinnon said. “The demand may change and we will adjust accordingly, but that will never change.”