

OPINION

EDITORIAL

A better plan for Long Beach

A new full hospital would not stay open

The more than 40,000 residents of Long Beach want their own full-service hospital to serve their barrier island. Many believe that the \$170 million in federal recovery money awarded after superstorm Sandy devastated Long Beach Medical Center should be spent entirely on the island. But that isn't going to happen.

If all the money were spent to build a new full-service hospital in Long Beach, it wouldn't be too many years before that hospital would close, leaving the money wasted and the island with no real health care facilities. That would be a disaster.

Instead, South Nassau Communities Hospital in Oceanside is proposing to spend \$40 million of the \$170 million to build a medical pavilion in Long Beach that would include an emergency room, dialysis stations, a laboratory, X-ray and other imaging equipment, a pharmacy and offices. The rest would go to expand and improve South Nassau's 455-bed facility, where Long Beach residents provide a larger part of the hospital's patient base than any other community.

According to South Nassau executives and the expert they hired to assess the situation, a new, small full-service hospital in Long Beach would lose about \$11 million a year, and would have a difficult time maintaining high-quality treatment.

This rings true, because even before Sandy, the 162-bed Long Beach Medical Center consistently lost money, and many patients opted to use mainland facilities.

There is no feasible economic model for a full hospital in Long Beach. And because so many of its residents get treatment at South Nassau, spending the federal money to improve the Oceanside facility with an expanded emergency room, an improved and hardened power and electrical plant, and 24 new critical care beds makes sense. Regionalization is where medicine is headed,



A rendering of the Long Beach Medical Arts Pavilion proposed by South Nassau Communities Hospital.

and improving the facilities Long Beach residents use is a smarter use of this money, even off-island. But it also makes sense to create a broad array of services and jobs in Long Beach. South Nassau officials say their plan will create about 245 jobs in Long Beach, and that the medical arts pavilion would be expandable and could as much as double in size at some point. What they describe is an “organic health care development that allows for growth over time.”

But “allows” isn't a strong enough commitment. South Nassau is going to face significant opposition from Long Beach residents and politicians to their plan to take \$130 million of money from the destruction in Long Beach to the mainland. It must respond with a promise to create a suite of medical services on Long Beach so strong that it attracts patients from the mainland looking for top care in oncology, geriatrics and other fields. The majority of the money is almost certainly going to the mainland, but the bridges work in both directions, and Long Beach residents who go to a mainland hospital for some needs have a right to see an alternative, dynamic medical facility come their way. — *The editorial board*