Sutter Health affirmed today that it will rebuild emergency room capacity when it closes hospital services at its Alta Bates campus due to state seismic regulations. The rebuilding process is expected to take up to 10 years, meaning the emergency room and inpatient hospital services provided at the Alta Bates campus in Berkeley will not move or close in 2019, as has been erroneously reported.

“I want to reassure our patients and community that we will continue providing all their healthcare needs with a robust network of new primary, specialty and urgent care in Berkeley--and in the next decade, with expanded emergency care nearby in Oakland,” Chuck Prosper, CEO of Alta Bates Summit, says.

“There is no imminent closure of Alta Bates or loss of jobs associated with the closure when it happens. We will still need staff to care for patients at the new Alta Bates in Oakland,” Prosper says.

Alta Bates Summit Medical Center is made up of three campuses: Alta Bates in Berkeley, Herrick in Berkeley and Summit in Oakland.

Sutter is currently conducting a thoughtful review of emergency services to ensure that residents of Berkeley, West Contra Costa County and UC Berkeley continue to have good access to emergency medical services. In addition, Sutter plans to rebuild its exceptional Women and Infants program and neonatal intensive care unit. Sutter is currently exploring rebuilding in Oakland, adjacent to its Summit campus.

“Starting in 2011, our Summit campus transitioned to become our designated EMS ambulance receiving center for all our cardiac and stroke patients. Ambulances across the East Bay--including from Berkeley and West Contra Costa County--have taken all our acute heart attack and stroke patients to our Summit Oakland emergency room,” said Brian Potts, M.D., Medical Director of the Alta Bates Emergency Department in Berkeley.

“The health and well-being of our patients and community will not be adversely affected by the future short travel distance from Berkeley and neighboring communities to our new Oakland campus. And our Alta Bates Summit emergency physicians look forward to continuing to care for our entire East Bay community from a new, state-of-the-art, expanded Emergency Department in Oakland,” Potts says.
Sutter Health and Alta Bates Summit have held more than 60 meetings with elected officials, and community and healthcare leaders across the East Bay to discuss these long-range plans, caused by the state of California’s seismic regulations that require hospitals to rebuild or retrofit to meet enhanced seismic safety standards by 2030. Almost all of the Alta Bates campus in Berkeley cannot be retrofitted to meet the new state standards for inpatient, hospital care.

In spite of these seismic constraints, Sutter Health is committed to continuing to serve the inner East Bay with high quality, accessible emergency, medical and hospital services. It is partnering with physicians, staff and the community to develop plans that accomplish this goal, while taking into consideration that fewer patients today receive inpatient care in hospitals as more care is delivered in outpatient settings, like a doctor’s office, surgery center, or walk-in or urgent care clinic—all of which are less expensive to patients and insurers.

At the Oakland location, Alta Bates Summit would enlarge its existing medical campus with a second, state-of-the-art pavilion that ensures all patients—regardless of their insurance or ability to pay—have access to the latest healthcare technology and advances. This includes all private rooms, which have been proven to promote faster healing and recovery. Sutter Health expects this project will invest more than a half-billion dollars into the East Bay economy and provide hundreds of construction jobs in the trade unions.

In Berkeley, Sutter Health has committed to expanding access to outpatient services, including doctors’ visits, surgery and cancer care centers, and urgent care clinics that could be located at either the Alta Bates campus on Ashby Avenue or the Herrick campus on Dwight Way.

“Berkeley has been part of our healthcare network for more than 100 years and that’s not going to change,” Prosper said.

More information is at rebuild.altabatessummit.org, and community updates will be shared as information becomes available.

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