



September 15, 2016

VIA: U.S. & ELECTRONIC MAIL

Hector H. Balderas, Attorney General
State of New Mexico
408 Galisteo Street
PO Box 1508
Santa Fe, NM 87501

RE: Request for Information Regarding Reinstatement of Alta Vista Regional Hospital's OB program

Dear Attorney General Balderas,

We greatly appreciate your support as we continue to rebuild our obstetrics program. We share your sense of urgency around restoring these services to our community and hope this letter provides the additional information you seek regarding our efforts to date.

As you know, temporary closure of our program was not a decision we made lightly and we did so only in acknowledgement that it is not in the best interest of our patients or the community to operate the program without the appropriate clinical staffing. Though a number of issues influence how quickly we can reopen the program, the number one challenge is physician recruitment and retention.

To address this issue, we've undertaken an aggressive recruitment effort, deploying numerous recruiters and doubling our sign-on bonus amounts. With these efforts we have conducted seven interviews to date, with one candidate onsite visit, yet we remain in need of at least two OBGYNs, two pediatricians or family providers capable of treating newborns, and approximately 10 OB nurses to appropriately staff and operate a labor and delivery service.

Difficulty recruiting clinicians generally, but especially physicians, is not unique to our hospital, but is an issue that adversely impacts rural health systems and communities across the country. Historically, New Mexico has had difficulty in both recruiting and retaining physicians to practice in rural areas in particular. This situation has, unfortunately, worsened in recent years. Currently, the New Mexico Health Resources website identifies 230 vacant openings for physicians, primarily in rural parts of the state.

In large part, as a result of the ongoing shortage of OB physicians, a significant number of rural hospitals in New Mexico have closed their obstetric practices. In addition to Alta Vista, the following seven rural acute care hospitals do not offer labor and delivery services: Artesia General Hospital, Trigg Memorial Hospital, Union County General Hospital, Guadalupe County Hospital, Nor-Lea General Hospital, Roosevelt General Hospital and Sierra General Hospital. In spite of these difficulties, however, Alta Vista recognizes the importance of labor and delivery and general obstetric services to our community and remains committed to the goal of resuming those services.

In addition to our own internal efforts, we continue to work with a wide range of partners at the state and local level to recruit the necessary physicians and create a path for more health professionals to live and serve in our community. Our efforts include:

- Working with the New Mexico Health Resources organization and a prominent physician recruitment firm to identify potential applicants;
- forming partnerships with prominent teaching colleges and medical programs such as the University of New Mexico's "BA to MD" program to create recruitment packages and increase interest in relocating;
- and establishing a rural health clinic staffed by a primary care physician and family nurse practitioner that will now allow us to be designated as a National Health Services Corp site and provide loan repayment for physicians in exchange for at least a two-year commitment.

Be assured, we have explored the option of hiring temporary physicians and nurses as a stop gap measure, but have found that many do not measure up to our quality standards or are unwilling to fill our need due to the on-call schedule they would be required to keep.

While our primary focus has been reopening our OB program, I would be remiss if I did not also mention the contributions our hospital has made to the Las Vegas community in recent months. Last month we celebrated the opening of Las Vegas Walk-In Care, a clinic designed to provide patients with increased access to outpatient care and help them avoid unnecessary (and costly) trips to the ER. In its first month the clinic provider saw more than 130 patients. We recently signed a contract with a local medical resident who will be joining us next summer as an additional family practitioner. Aside from OB recruitment, our sights are set on adding additional cardiac, general surgery and orthopedic staff to our roster within the next year.

All of these efforts will take time, and reopening our OB program will not happen overnight, but let me assure you we remain committed to providing the care that is needed by our patients and the families we serve. As an effort to keep the Las Vegas community informed of our progress in reestablishing our OB program, we have created an informational website at www.altavistaregionalhospital.com/obinfo.

Again, I want to express my sincere thanks for your support and I look forward to our continued dialogue on this issue.

Sincerely,



R. Chris Wolf
Chief Executive Officer