

Phoebe Putney Health System denies involvement in CON opposition

Decision expected this week on certificate of need for Lee County Medical Center

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ALBANY — Based on comments at an opposition hearing before the Department of Community Health last month concerning the proposed Lee County Medical Center, supporters of the Lee hospital say Phoebe Putney Health System is involved in the fight to get LCMC's certificate of need denied.

While such claims surfaced in an LCMC answer to the opposition hearing, presented to DCH on Nov. 5, Phoebe remains firm in stating that it has not been involved in the opposition of the Lee hospital development.

John Ray, a CON expert who works with Franklin, Tenn.-based Surgical Development Partners LLC, compiled a 46-page response to comments made by four entities — the Dougherty County Commission, Crisp Regional Hospital, the nonprofit Georgia Alliance of Community Hospitals and Lee/Dougherty County Realtor William Hancock.

Ray addressed that matter of Phoebe's supposed involvement in the opposition response, saying both the Crisp hospital and the Georgia Alliance of Community Hospitals were acting on behalf of Phoebe Putney Memorial Hospital, which gave up its right to oppose a CON in a specific geographical area — including Lee County — as part of a settlement with the Federal Trade Commission in its successful efforts to purchase then-Palmyra Medical Center.

“It is apparent that Phoebe Memorial Hospital and Phoebe Health System is (sic) indirectly opposing the project through Crisp, the Alliance and Dougherty County,” the attorney wrote. “For example, Attachment D to Crisp's opposition contains an internal (non-public) report from Phoebe Putney Memorial Hospital. The stated objective of this report, which was prepared by DHG Healthcare for Phoebe Putney Health System, is to ‘estimate the potential impact on Phoebe Putney Health System of the opening of the proposed New Facility.’ This report could only have been provided to Crisp by Phoebe.

“Likewise, Exhibit 11 to the opposition statement submitted by the Alliance contains Phoebe Putney Memorial Hospital's 2016 Community Health Needs Assessment but does not contain the Health Needs Assessment of any other provider, which the Alliance supposedly represents through its opposition. Phoebe's indirect opposition of this project should be disregarded by the Department as such opposition is strictly prohibited by the March 31, 2015 Agreement Containing Consent Order by and among the Federal Trade Commission, Phoebe Putney Memorial Hospital and its affiliates and HCA Inc., and the FTC Order contained therein.”

Officials at Phoebe released a statement Friday that said the health system remains uninvolved in the effort to oppose the CON.

“Phoebe has not provided any information to any individual or group to assist them in their opposition to the proposed Lee County hospital Certificate of Need application,” a statement from Phoebe officials said Friday. “We take our voluntary agreement with the Federal Trade Commission extremely seriously and have not violated the order. Any suggestion to the contrary is false.

“The Community Health Needs Assessment is required by the IRS and was completed with the assistance and input of numerous community partners. It is posted on the Phoebe website and is available through other public sources. The impact report compiled by DHG is also a public document. It was presented during open session at a Hospital Board of Directors meeting and was provided to the media, to elected officials who requested it and to at least one private citizen who made an Open Records Act request.”

The Georgia Department of Community Health is expected to hand down a decision on the CON for the proposed 60-bed Lee hospital no later than Wednesday.