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Hospitals - Dominican Hospital

Dominican Hospital considers buying other hospital in SC

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Dominican Santa Cruz Hospital officials announced yesterday they are considering buying AMI Community Hospital of Santa Cruz.

Community Hospital's parent company put it on the market about a month ago, along with several other hospitals, and Sister Julie Hyer, Dominican's president and chief executive, said Dominican Hospital officials at that time started considering buying it.

Ann Klein, Community Hospital's executive director, said there have been "numerous inquiries" into the sale of the hospital, other than Dominican's. Community's parent company is hoping to move fairly quickly in selling the hospital, she said.

"They're hoping to make a decision in the next six months," she said.

The 180-bed Community Hospital could provide expansion room for the 265-bed Dominican Hospital, which has nowhere left to grow. Dominican Hospital's mental-health unit and education programs are housed in separate buildings on the hospital grounds, but there is no space to continue building on the grounds and no nearby land that could be purchased, Hyer said.

"We are out of space," she said. "All we have left are parking lots."

Dominican cannot build on the parking lots because that would leave no parking space, she said.

Asked whether Dominican would locate different programs at each of the hospitals, provided it purchases Community, Hyer said, "Those are precisely the kinds of things that we are going to begin looking at."

The hospitals have feuded in

the past over their heart-care centers. Community established one first and criticized Dominican for opening a second one, claiming the community could not support two such centers.

Dominican will start evaluating Community Hospital as a possible purchase, Hyer said. That will include looking at additional programs an expansion might enable Dominican to provide, she said, and asking community members what programs they would like to see.

To get feedback from the community, Dominican will identify key community groups and then invite those groups to the hospital to talk about their concerns, Hyer said. It's important to find out what the community wants, she said.

"For the 50 years that we've been here," she said, "we've always responded to community needs."