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Hospital's new patient care tower on track for completion in May

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SENECA — Oconee Medical Center's (OMC) new 155-bed patient tower is 90 percent complete and on time for an early May completion.

Board members were told this week that May 7-9 public events celebrating the opening of the $44 million facility should be able to move forward without interruption as contractors move into the "punch list" phase of construction.

OMC plans to have private events associated with the opening on May 8 and a "county fair" type public celebration, complete with parade, rides, games and food on May 9. The facility will then spend about six weeks undergoing final licensing checks and stocking. Patients will move into the new structure on June 20.

"We're around the third turn and headed down the home stretch," said Board Chairman Bill Howiler.

Also this week, board members were informed that February was a good financial month despite being $159,000 over budget in salaries and $110,000 over in bad debts. A $219,000 savings in supplies offset most of the overages. For the month, expenses totaled $10.7 million against a $10.6 million budget.

Revenues were over budget by $83,000 at $11.1 million against a budget of $11 million.

Net operating income for the month was $317,261 versus a budgeted profit of $357,450. Chief Financial Officer Greg Scarbrough said the hospital's profit margin for the month was 2.9 percent. For the year it is 2.4 percent.

"We're hanging in there," Scarbrough told board members.

One item of note regarding the cost of hospital operations was board approval to spend $1.2 million for 114 new beds in the patient tower.

Board members also watched a video on the importance to hospitals and communities of maintaining state Medicaid payments. South Carolina's budget crisis has resulted in cuts to Medicaid and additional cuts have been suggested. Members of the South Carolina Hospital Association (SCHA) hope to use the video as an informational tool.

SCHA argues that, because of matching federal dollars, Medicaid results in $12.1 billion in business and provides 61,000 jobs statewide. Medicaid covers health care for 23 percent of the state's population and funds half of the state's births. Currently, 700,000 South Carolina residents are without insurance, 80 percent of whom are members of working families.