Oconee hospital name to change

BY NORMAN CANNADA
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SENECA — When Oconee Medical Center becomes part of Greenville Health System next week, it will have a new name — but a familiar one.

The hospital will be known as Oconee Memorial Hospital when the merger officially takes place Oct. 1, according to OMC chief operating officer Hunter Kome. It was known as Oconee Memorial for many years before becoming Oconee Medical Center, and many area residents still refer to the hospital as Oconee Memorial Hospital.

"All of the acute care hospitals in the Greenville Health System are called 'Memorial,'" Kome said Monday night during a break in the OMC board of directors meeting. "There are a couple of specialty hospitals that don't have that in their name. This campus will be referred to as Oconee Medical Campus. Each facility on the campus will have its own

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name. Lila Doyle will still be Lila Doyle, and so on."

Two things that have yet to be announced are the titles for Kome and OMC president and CEO Jeanne Ward once Greenville takes control of the Seneca hospital, and the selection of two representatives from Oconee's service area to the GHS board.

Kome said titles will likely be announced "very soon," and the process for selecting the board members has not yet begun.

"My understanding is that there is a process Greenville uses, and they publicize that," Kome said. "I think they place ads in the newspaper seeking input. To my knowledge, that process has not started."

The lease and contribution agreement, approved unanimously by both the OMC and GHS boards in June, calls for GHS to lease the property and operations of OMC for 50 years with the potential for two 25-year renewals that could run the agreement to Sept. 30, 2114.

In exchange for the lease, GHS will take over all current and future liabilities of the Seneca hospital, including about $90 million in debt, about $82 million of which is long-term debt. Ward said all but about a half dozen OMC employees will have jobs when the merger take effect.

Doctors currently working for the hospital had the option of taking positions with University Medical Group, the physicians network of GHS, or being independent..

The agreement also calls for the GHS board to increase by two members, both coming from the OMC service area. At least one of those would have to be a resident of Oconee County.

Current changes in the healthcare industry, combined with increasing economic challenges, including the hospital's debt, have been cited as reasons for considering affiliating with GHS since Oconee officials announced Jan. 27 they were "exploring a formal arrangement" with GHS.

OMC officials announced at the meeting that hospital revenues were up over expenses by $219,973 for August, one of the few months this year OMC has posted a gain. The hospital has lost about $1.4 million since the fiscal year began in October 2013.

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