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NYC's Public Hospital System Unveils Financial Plan

CEO Ram Raju wants to increase number of patients treated and reduce wait times



Health & Hospitals Corp. President and CEO Ram Raju, center, greets attendees after outlining the organization's financial plans to HHC employees and stakeholders at John Jay College on

By **DEREK KRAVITZ**

New York City's cash-strapped public hospital system, tasked with caring for many of the city's uninsured and vulnerable residents and facing growing budget deficits, unveiled a plan on Tuesday to help shore up its finances by 2020.

Ram Raju, president and chief executive of the New York City Health & Hospitals Corp., spoke to hundreds of employees, labor leaders and elected officials at Manhattan's John

Jay College, outlining a plan to increase the number of patients treated and reduce wait times.

Dr. Raju said the city would double the number of people enrolled in MetroPlus, to one million, within five years. More than 469,000 people are now enrolled in the low-cost insurance program, which is available to Medicare, Medicaid and certain special-needs patients, and can be purchased on the new health-insurance exchange.

He also announced goals to increase the number of patients the hospital system treats, to two million people by 2020.

“We are essential because immigrants, the uninsured and the undocumented have never stopped coming to New York,” Dr. Raju said. “It is absolutely essential that there be a place that welcomes them as they seek care and treatment.”

The city’s public-health system has been plagued by mounting deficits. A November report by the nonprofit, nonpartisan Citizens Budget Commission called the hospital system’s financial outlook “troubled” and projected its deficits would balloon to \$1.7 billion in fiscal 2018 from \$702 million in fiscal 2015.

During the recession, when the number of uninsured patients visiting city hospitals surged, deficits prompted layoffs and staff cuts through attrition.

The Healthcare Association of New York State, representing more than 500 nonprofit hospitals and related facilities, called the HHC proposal a “bold, new course to propel the system forward.”

Dr. Raju told a New York City Council budget committee last month that reduced federal funding resulting from the Affordable Care Act, even with fewer uninsured patients sent to public hospitals over time, would squeeze HHC’s budget even further.

Mayor Bill de Blasio tapped Dr. Raju in January 2014 to run the city’s hospital system, the largest municipal-hospital system in the U.S. Dr. Raju previously led Chicago’s Cook County Health and Hospital System for 2½ years.

New York City's public hospital system, which was started in 1969 and employs about 35,000 people, includes 11 acute-care hospitals and more than 70 community-based clinics, as well as treatment centers and nursing facilities throughout the five boroughs.

Also on Tuesday, Mr. de Blasio announced the appointment of Gordon Campbell, chairman of the city's Board of Correction, to the hospital system's board and former president and CEO of the United Way of New York.