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Enloe Children's Health Center may get new owner

By LARRY MITCHELL - STAFF WRITER
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CHICO—In the future, Del Norte Clinics Inc. might run the Enloe Children's Health Center here, which is now operated by Enloe Medical Center.

Since November, discussions have been going on between Enloe and Del Norte Clinics.

"All we have been doing so far is exploring the possibilities," said Benjamin Flores, chief executive officer of Del Norte Clinics in a phone interview Friday. He said he wasn't sure when a decision might be made.

Del Norte, based in Yuba City, is a nonprofit corporation that runs 12 clinics around the north state, including the Chico Family Health Center on Cohasset Road. These clinics mostly serve poor people, including many who are on Medi-Cal and can't get health care elsewhere.

The Enloe Children's Health Center mainly serves children whose families are on Medi-Cal. It has about 5,000 patients, said Laura Hennem, an Enloe vice president. Running the Children's Health Center costs Enloe money, she said, adding the hospital has operated it as a public service since 1993.

Hennem said it could make sense for Del Norte to take over running the Enloe Children's Health Center because of Del Norte's status as a Federally Qualified Health Center. Such centers mainly serve the poor.

She said President Obama's health care reform legislation, the Affordable Care Act, allocated \$11 billion to Federally Qualified Health Centers around the nation. With that much money available, Del Norte might be able to provide more resources to patients of

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Enloe Children's Center could be purchased by Del Norte Clinics. (Jason Halley/Staff Photo)

the Enloe Children's Health Center, she said.

Flores said of the \$11 billion, \$1.5 billion was dedicated to capital projects. Del Norte applied for a grant and received \$4.8 million through the \$1.5 billion fund.

He said the \$4.8 million will be used for a construction project in Olivehurst, for building a new clinic in Hamilton City, and for expanding the Chico Family Health Center. The Chico clinic will get additional examination rooms.

Enlarging the Chico Family Health Center would make it easier for Del Norte to absorb the Enloe Children's Health Center, he said, but that's not the reason discussions are occurring.

He said Del Norte is interested in running Enloe's pediatric clinic because "our mission is to provide the best possible outpatient care to the community"

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"We try to do whatever is best for the community," he said. "Del Norte's expertise is primary outpatient care. Enloe's expertise is inpatient care."

He said the quality of primary care at Del Norte's clinics is as good as anywhere else in the north state. And he noted the Chico Family Health Center presently has "a pediatric practice."

As a Federally Qualified Health Clinic, Del Norte has a couple of financial advantages that Enloe and other kinds of health care providers do not, Flores said. Federally Qualified Health Clinics receive higher payments through Medi-Cal, and they are subsidized by the federal government. For Del Norte, the direct subsidies make up 10 percent of its budget, he said.

Del Norte serves five north state counties, has more than 60,000 patients, and employs nearly 400 people.

Hennem said the Enloe Children's Health Center, located on Cohasset Road next to the Enloe Cancer Center, is staffed mainly by five nurse practitioners. Nine pediatricians from the community work under contract with Enloe. They come in at regular times and see patients and consult with the regular staff. One pediatrician has extra duties, serving as the center's medical director.

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