

Florida Medical Association FACT SHEET



HOSPITAL DEPARTMENT CLOSURE

HB by Rep.

SB by Sen.

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FMA Position

The FMA supports legislation that would give the Agency for Health Care Administration the power to investigate decisions by a hospital to close a particular department and to take action to ensure that patients are not left without needed medical care.

Background

Bartow Regional Medical Center in Polk County Florida closed the obstetric department of their hospital to further deliveries in July of 2007. In a letter sent to the Secretary of the Agency for Health Care Administration, the hospital stated that they were giving their obstetrical patients only 40 days to find an alternative facility in which to deliver their babies. The affected physicians at BRMC expressed concern that this short notice was inadequate and placed the health of both the pregnant mothers and their unborn children at risk. Nevertheless, the hospital closed their obstetrical department and forced their patients to seek alternative care at other facilities miles away.

Conclusion

While a hospital's decision to close a particular department hinges on many factors, most of them economic in nature, such a decision should always be made with the best interests of the patients in mind. Adequate notice of a decision to close a particular facility should be given far enough in advance to allow the affected patients enough time to arrange alternative care.