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NYP to cut Allen Hospital psych unit amid proposed $70M makeover

New York-Presbyterian is seeking state approval to close a 30-bed psychiatric unit on the third floor of Allen Hospital in the Inwood section of Manhattan to make way for modernized and improved maternity services. It is part of a proposed $69.6 million renovation that will include four new operating rooms on the first floor to boost surgical capacity.

New York-Presbyterian has sufficient behavioral health capacity to absorb the patients from Allen Hospital elsewhere in the system, according to the certificate-of-need application filed with the state. It added that the health system has "developed a regional model of inpatient psychiatric care across the behavioral health service line that aligns clinical settings to patients' needs and assures that all patients receive the right care at the right time and in the appropriate setting."

Still, the move is part of a broader trend that contributes to NYC Health + Hospitals housing a disproportionate share of the city's psychiatric beds, the Independent Budget Office noted in a report released in July. Nearly half of the city's psychiatric beds are located in NYC Health + Hospitals facilities, the IBO found. And while psychiatric hospitalizations decreased 5% at voluntary hospitals between 2009 and 2014, they increased by about 20% at H+H facilities during that period. (H+H has seen a decline in mental health stays since 2014, the health system told The New York Times.)

In recent years Northwell Health has shut down inpatient psychiatric units at Long Island Jewish Valley Stream, North Shore University Hospital, Glen Cove Hospital and Southside Hospital. The health system has said this is part of an effort to create centers of excellence for behavioral health that include a continuum of inpatient and outpatient care.

Voluntary hospitals are following in the footsteps of the state. Public psychiatric hospitals under the purview of the state Office of Mental Health have been reducing inpatient beds for years in an effort to serve more people with mental illnesses in the community. Critics say without commensurate investment in housing and community services, this contributes to higher rates of homelessness and incarceration among people with mental illnesses.

"In a perfect world, in the public sector the savings from reducing beds would be invested in housing services that provide a similar level of care for people who need that type of care," said Matthew Shapiro, associate director of public affairs at the state chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness. "In the private sector, I'm not sure we see that money being reinvested in community services."

In a statement, New York-Presbyterian wrote, "The behavioral health services we provide to the northern Manhattan community will continue to include inpatient care and outpatient care, and we will continue to work closely with our local community and social-service providers to identify and treat behavioral issues before they require inpatient care."—C.L.