

Emergency Services Absent a Hospital Pose a Significant Threat to the Health and Safety of Berkeley and East Bay Residents

A proposal to replace Alta Bates as a full-service acute care hospital with medical offices and a stand-alone emergency department has been circulating since Sutter announced its intention to close Alta Bates Hospital. This would present a dire risk to patients that have historically been served by Alta Bates.

In California, regulations do not allow free-standing emergency departments. Why? Because a stand alone emergency department that is not tied to acute-care services in a hospital does a disservice to patients; instead, Urgent Care Centers (UCCs) can stand alone but do not treat true emergencies.

Urgent Care Centers do not have ready access to the host of hospital units, like intensive care, where treatment continues in order to heal patients or keep them alive. Additionally, UCCs do not have the wide array of specially trained staff that are necessary to treat true emergencies. The following is a partial list of conditions that cannot be treated at an Urgent Care Center:

- Heart attacks
- Severe bleeding
- Internal bleeding
- Unconsciousness
- Poisoning
- Strokes
- Difficulty breathing
- Moderate to severe burns
- Convulsions or seizures
- Serious head, neck, or back injury
- Severe broken bones
- Open or angulated fractures
- Falls from greater than 7 feet
- Infants less than 6 months of age or with a temperature greater than 103 degrees
- Pregnancy, bleeding, or complications
- Life-threatening allergic reactions
- Severe choking (cannot breathe or talk)
- Severe abdominal pain
- Amputation of a body part
- Near drowning
- Electrical shock

Patients needing true emergency care would have to be rushed by ambulance from a UCC to a full-service hospital, posing additional dangers. Delays can range from 30 to 90 minutes or longer even in adjacent cities, based on ambulance availability, a patient's condition, staff available to transport, and staffing levels at the receiving Emergency Room. Every minute wasted would lessen one's chance to survive. Additionally, when Berkeley's first responders are mandated to travel to Summit in Oakland, they are unavailable for service for the rest of Berkeley for prolonged periods, forcing an unacceptable healthcare standard on local residents.

Urgent care services may be extremely costly, especially when considering true emergencies are not treated. Many Urgent Care Centers (often mistakenly referred to as EDs) are owned by large hospital chains. They are staffed by ER doctors who earn large profits due to the ability to charge higher rates (often 3 times higher) even though heart attacks, strokes, trauma, and other conditions are not treated, nor are patients accepted by ambulance.

The California Nurses Association staunchly opposes the proposal to close Alta Bates hospital. Berkeley and other East Bay residents will die without timely access to a full service acute care hospital.