Laramie, ho!

Ivinson Memorial May Join UCHealth

By Tyler Smith

The entities that comprise University of Colorado Health could soon have a northern neighbor.

The University of Colorado Health system and Ivinson Memorial Hospital, a 99-bed facility in Laramie, Wyo., announced July 16 that they are negotiating a “management agreement” that would bring Ivinson into the system’s expanding sphere. Details of the arrangement are still being worked out, according to UC Health President Rulon Stacey.

“Technically, the Ivinson Memorial Hospital Board of Directors agreed to enter into exclusive negotiations with UC Health,” Stacey said. The idea is that UC Health would manage operations for Ivinson, while the Laramie hospital would retain responsibility for its finances, he added.

“Assuming responsibility for management means that we would engage them into our own system as we would any other organization,” Stacey said. “And we would expect to see them as a meaningful part of our strategic planning.”

Ivinson’s board of directors would maintain ultimate control of the facility, Stacey said. That would differentiate it from the proposed arrangement between UC Health and Memorial Health System in Colorado Springs, where voters will decide Aug. 28 on whether or not to lease the city-run Memorial Health System to UC Health. If the measure passes, UC Health would take over operations of Memorial Oct. 1.

“The arrangement with Ivinson demonstrates the flexible nature of our organization and ability to work with others,” Stacey said.

Still talking. There is no firm timeline for completing the negotiations with Ivinson, he added. “We’ll spend the next weeks designing the contract to meet their needs and help us provide the best service possible.”

Ivinson CEO Carol Dozier said her hospital’s board “would like to have the negotiations done within two months.”

If both sides agree, Ivinson would join University of Colorado Hospital, Poudre Valley Hospital and Medical Center of the Rockies in the UC Health system, which formally launched in late January after UCH and Poudre Valley Health System (PVHS) signed a joint operating agreement (Insider, Feb. 1, 2012).

The negotiations grew out of a longstanding relationship between Ivinson and northern Colorado-based PVHS, Stacey said. “They’ve referred patients they can’t treat to PVHS for many years,” he said. Ivinson’s trauma patients go to Medical Center of the Rockies, Dozier said. The hospital also refers cardiovascular and a mixture of other specialty cases to PVHS, she noted.

After PVHS joined UC Health, Ivinson “entertained proposals for an affiliation,” Dozier explained. The Ivinson board ultimately narrowed the list to UC Health, HCA and Exempla before giving the nod to UC Health.

Stacey called Ivinson Memorial a “like-minded organization with values that will mesh with those of UC Health.” He noted, for example, Ivinson’s interest in pursuing Magnet designation, considered the gold standard for nursing excellence. Both UCH...
and PVHS are Magnet facilities.

“Before we would allow another organization into our system, it would have to demonstrate a background of clinical excellence,” Stacey said. “Ivinson Memorial has demonstrated the highest clinical standards in Wyoming, and we felt that would make for a mutually beneficial affiliation.”

For her part, Dozier called UC Health “a good cultural fit” for Ivinson because of the system’s emphasis on patient-centered care, clinical quality and employee engagement.

“We want to share resources and best practices and be able to apply those to our organizations,” Dozier said.

Stacey and Dozier both agreed that the prospect of changes wrought by health care reform, which include lower reimbursement rates and a growing emphasis on measuring and rewarding the quality of care, was one major factor in the decision to forge a formal relationship.

“From a health reform perspective, it’s imperative that we find meaningful collaborations across a broader geographic distribution,” Stacey said. By consolidating, system leaders hope to find ways to deliver care more efficiently, identify best clinical practices and standardize care.

“Health care reform will mandate that we drive variation out of the industry, that we share and implement best practices and share data back and forth as a way of becoming good at population-based patient management,” Stacey said.

**Standardization.** He expects Ivinson’s chief nursing officer to meet with her counterparts across the UC Health system to begin discussions about establishing uniform standards of care and identifying measures for benchmarking data.

The arrangement would also create another link in a lengthening continuum of care that would run north from Colorado Springs to Laramie. Stacey emphasized that the goal will be for Ivinson Memorial’s patients to continue their care in Laramie whenever possible. Those who need services that aren’t available in the community would ideally get referrals to PVHS hospitals or to UCH.

Expanding the system’s pool of patients, Stacey added, could also benefit the CU School of Medicine and its faculty members.

“We can increase the scope of our research and education mission as we expand and enhance our relationship with the School of Medicine,” he said.

From Ivinson’s perspective, increased access to clinical trials and research is “another advantage to the partnership,” Dozier said.

Asked about the risks of expanding the system at a relatively rapid pace, Stacey said, “It’s a fine line. We have to get our foundation set to do what we need to do to meet the basics. Our first goal is to make sure we take what we have and are successful in establishing the relationships that we have.

“But when strategic discussions like this one come up, we feel we have to address them,” he concluded.