Is The End Near For Small Community Hospitals?

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Are the days numbered for Salem Community Hospital and other community hospitals around the country? Recently, a local story happened that made me think of this.

The announcement was made that the Akron General Health System was being purchased by a joint venture of Cleveland Clinic and Community Health Systems (CHS) [1]. CHS is a Tennessee-based hospital operator who also owns three other hospitals in the Northeastern Ohio area where I live.

Six months ago, Akron City Hospital along with the rest of the Summa Health System announced that they were joining Catholic Health Partners (CHP) [2], the largest hospital system in Ohio. CHP owns a hospital in the Youngstown, Ohio market, close to where I live.

There are two hospitals in Columbiana County: Salem Community Hospital and East Liverpool City Hospital [3]. As of this second, these two hospitals are still independently owned and operated, but for how long?

I am by no means a hospital policy expert. But, it’s not hard to see that across the country, smaller hospitals are either being bought or joining larger hospital systems. This has already played out in Ohio’s larger cities of Cleveland, Toledo, and Columbus.

Salem Community Hospital (SCH) is in the midst of building a new patient tower with 87 private rooms. SCH also boasts the area’s only 3T open MRI unit between Cleveland and Pittsburgh. On the negative side, SCH recently announced the resignation of their CEO [4], but states that current leadership is still committed to the future. Will all that be enough to sustain hospital independence, or is aligning with a larger hospital system (like Cleveland Clinic, CHS, CHP, or even University of Pittsburgh Medical Center) inevitable at some point?

“Why one-third of hospitals will close by 2020 [5]” is an essay that says, “What hospitals are about to enter is the place Americans cherish: the open competitive market. We know what happens in this environment. There are winners and losers.”

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[1] http://www.ohio.com/news/break-news/national-hospital-chain-cleveland-clinic-reach-tentative-deal-to-buy-akron-general-1.422931
[2] http://barberton.ohio.com/summa-to-join-with-catholic-health-partners-1.375111
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