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Westchester Hospital Resuming Heart Transplants With 2 Additional Surgeons

By LISA W. FODERARO

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WHITE PLAINS, Jan. 6 - Six months after it stopped performing heart transplants, Westchester Medical Center in Valhalla, N.Y., announced yesterday that it would restart the program in February, under the direction of two cardiothoracic surgeons from Mount Sinai Medical Center.

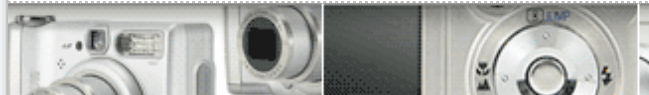
The move was a ray of positive news for a hospital that has been struggling to turn itself around after losing tens of millions of dollars in the past few years. The estimated loss for 2004 is \$41 million, which was about half the loss of the year before.

In July, when the hospital said it would suspend heart transplants while keeping its active kidney and liver transplant program going, officials cited declining patients and a lack of profitability. At the time, there were only four heart-transplant candidates being treated as inpatients at the hospital, along with 11 outpatients. Most were transferred to Montefiore Medical Center in the Bronx.

On Thursday, the Westchester hospital's interim president and chief executive, Mary Brown, said in a statement that the hospital had attracted "top-flight, internationally known" surgeons from New York City, in announcing the hiring of Dr. Steven L. Lansman and Dr. David Spielvogel, both of Mount Sinai Hospital in Manhattan.

Dr. Lansman, who will be Westchester Medical Center's chief of cardiothoracic surgery, has been director of Mount Sinai's heart and lung transplant program since its inception in 1989, performing more than 300 heart transplants there.

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Hospital officials at Westchester said that Dr. Lansman planned to take immediate steps to reactivate the heart transplant program through the United Network of Organ Sharing, which oversees all transplant waiting lists in the United States.

Westchester Medical Center performed 10 heart transplants in 2003 and only two last year. By contrast, Columbia University Medical Center had 87 heart transplants in 2003.

Danny Loughran, a spokesman for the 1,000-bed Westchester center, said officials there hoped that Dr. Lansman and Dr. Spielvogel would reinvigorate the heart-transplant program and attract new patients, given their track records at Mount Sinai, a highly respected, big-city teaching hospital. "They're very prominent," he said. "They bring so much experience and credibility that the hospital's confident that they'll be able to use that expertise to run the program effectively."

Some of the inpatients who were transferred to Montefiore expressed anger and regret at the time that they were being forced to uproot during such a stressful time.

One outpatient, Robert K. Ulmer of Somers, who was sent to Montefiore for treatment, said he would consider returning to Westchester Medical Center.

"It's much more convenient for me," said Mr. Ulmer, 58, a retired New York City fireman. "It takes me an hour to get to Montefiore, but only 20 minutes to Westchester. I think they should be here. They've been very helpful to me over the years."



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