Bronson, Battle Creek Health System deal could add a new partner to planning for medical school in Kalamazoo

Published: Wednesday, January 05, 2011, 11:21 AM     Updated: Wednesday, January 05, 2011, 2:32 PM

By Mark Sanchez | Business Review West Michigan

KALAMAZOO — Battle Creek Health System’s proposed integration into Bronson Healthcare Group could very well bring a new partner to Western Michigan University’s planning for a new medical school.

Bronson is partnering with WMU and Borgess Health to develop a medical school in Kalamazoo.

“Our new relationship with Battle Creek will enhance collaboration with professionals and the whole medical school scenario,” Bronson Healthcare Group President and CEO Frank Sardone said.

Bronson’s acquisition of a 51 percent stake in Battle Creek, announced Dec. 14, is targeted to close in mid-2011.

Battle Creek has been talking to WMU about a possible role in the new medical school.

The deal with Bronson certainly “enhances our ability to become a partner” in the project, President and CEO Denise Brooks-Williams said.

Becoming a partner in the medical school would enable Battle Creek’s medical staff to become involved in teaching and research, boosting the health system’s ability to recruit physicians, she said.

Battle Creek also could begin hosting third- and fourth-year medical students from WMU as they go through their clinical training, or medical residents after their graduation, Brooks-Williams said.

Planning for the medical school is ongoing. A search committee is continuing its work to hire a founding dean for the medical school and is reviewing three present candidates selected from a field of 60 applicants. A decision could come this year, though there is no specific target date for filling the position.

Planning to date would have the first group of medical students begin classes in Kalamazoo probably in 2013 or 2014.
Bronson Healthcare Group plans to buy a 50 percent stake in Battle Creek Health System from parent company Trinity Health, plus another 1 percent from Battle Creek Health System Community Partners, which will get representation on the Bronson corporate board.

Executives bill the deal as a way to drive improvements in the coordination of care across a broader market. By essentially uniting, the Battle Creek and Kalamazoo health systems can better plan the future together, better coordinate care and, in areas where they overlap markets, avoid costly duplications in medical services, executive say.

“Our goal is to reduce that fragmentation that occurs, and we think it is increasingly important to coordinate care on a regional basis,” Sardone said. “It was a matter of both organizations coming together and realizing we have a shared vision of a coordinated health care system that works better for patients.”

© 2011 MLive.com. All rights reserved.