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Westfield: Emergency care in limbo

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Viewed from Albany, we suppose, the drive to Jamestown from Mayville is no big thing.

If you are at the county seat and having a heart attack, the state believes, the 20-mile drive to WCA Hospital's emergency department is good enough for you.

You see, viewed from Albany, the emergency department at Westfield Memorial Hospital - although only seven miles from Mayville and so in a much better position to help you - is a waste of money and should be closed.

The longer drive to the emergency room at WCA or at Brooks in Dunkirk is good enough for the 30,000 residents who live in the Westfield hospital's rural service area and everyone else who works there. Never mind that we have no professional ambulance services that can be on the way at a moment's notice in that part of the county. Instead we depend, however gratefully, on our neighbors, the EMTs from local volunteer fire departments who are at work or at home or in any case are no where near the fire hall and the ambulance when the 911 emergency call comes in.

And never mind that the commission the state turned to in the first place for recommendations on what to do with Westfield Hospital directly and unequivocally stated:

"The Westfield community must have an appropriate level of medical care that would include emergency care, and ambulatory surgery, diagnostic services, and other outpatient programs that are appropriate and needed in the community." (Western New York Regional Advisory Committee report to the Omission on Health Care Facilities in the 21st Century).

Never mind.

Viewed from Albany, second-rate is good enough for people in Chautauqua County - and that is exactly where the state is steering us. Instead of a 24-hour emergency department at Westfield, the state intends to allow us to have only "urgent need" care 12 hours a day there. That will be, essentially, a clinic offering treatment for things not serious enough to require a trip to the emergency room.

Given our geography, our fierce weather and the lack of professional ambulance services in the rural area, the state's decision is unconscionable and will be, without doubt, deadly for some.

We join, and hope you will too, all those who vehemently oppose elimination of emergency medical services in the county's rural areas.

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