

2 City Hospitals' Concerns Go Beyond Costly Fix-Ups

By DAVID SIMS | Posted: Monday, November 19, 2012 4:00 pm

Hurricane Sandy may be gone, but the damage it dealt to the city's hospital system, particularly to Bellevue and Coney Island Hospitals, will be felt for months, Health and Hospitals Corporation President Alan Aviles told a Crain's forum Nov. 13.

The two hospitals, which were flooded and had to be evacuated during the storm, will receive an influx of \$300 million in emergency funds from the city to help with the rebuilding effort. But Mr. Aviles said that would only be the beginning of what's needed, according to Crain's.

'Must Reposition Them'

"We are completely focused on getting these hospitals up and running again," he said. "That means that there will be limited opportunity to address some of the repositioning issues that are involved here that are really quite complicated.

"We're going to have to do that with urgency once we get past this initial challenge of getting the hospitals up and running," he continued. "It will be expensive not just to replace, but to reposition these systems in facilities that you're running 24/7 and you can't just shut down... That price-tag is likely to be north of \$300 million."

Mr. Aviles is looking to prevent the waterfront hospitals from encountering the same problems in the face of a similar storm in the future, which he admitted was "an expensive proposition."

He estimated it would take two months to restore Coney Island Hospital and three months to restore Bellevue, which saw its backup generator fail because of flood damage. Currently, patients and HHC employees are scattered amongst other hospitals in the city, primarily Metropolitan Hospital in Manhattan and Kings County and Woodhull Hospitals in Brooklyn.

'Just Happy They're Working'

District Council 37 Local 420 President Carmen Charles said that while some of her members were travelling farther to get to work, they were happy to have the opportunity.

"The upside to this is, regardless of what happened, they're still working. They have challenges, but at the end of the day it's about making sure they're still working," she said in a phone interview.

The Service Employees International Union Doctors Council has also canvassed its members for feedback on the post-Sandy upheaval, and has received little response because most affected

members are away from their offices. But the general HHC infrastructure continues to function, a union spokeswoman said.