



Public Hearing Comments

Catawba County Operating Room Adjusted Need Petition

Good afternoon. My name is Sheree Watson. I am the Chief Executive Officer of Graystone Ophthalmology Associates, and I am here today to speak on behalf of our petition for an adjusted need determination to include one additional operating room in the 2017 State Medical Facilities Plan. This is to address the growing demand for ambulatory surgical procedures in freestanding facilities in Catawba County.

Our Graystone Eye Surgery Center has provided community-based eye health care for residents of the Catawba Valley area since 1969. Our board-certified ophthalmologists provide comprehensive ophthalmic services, including a wide range of specialized medical and surgical care. Last year, we performed over 6,000 outpatient surgical procedures on local residents.

The Proposed 2017 SMFP indicates no need determination for additional operating rooms in Catawba County. However, we believe that unique circumstances exist in Catawba County which substantiate the need for one additional operating room within the service area. This afternoon we will submit our petition to the SHCC. I'd like to briefly highlight some of the evidence justifying the inclusion of one additional operating room for Catawba County.

Well-utilized Facility

Our ambulatory surgery center in Catawba County is operating far above practical capacity. As shown in the Proposed 2017 SMFP, Graystone is operating at 243% of practical capacity. Utilization at Graystone has increased 53% since 2010. Last year we performed over 6,000 cases in our two operating rooms, which has resulted in significant challenges. It is important that Catawba County providers have the means to accommodate this growing demand. If an adjusted need determination is not made, our facility would not have an opportunity to seek CON approval for an expansion, and would continue to operate well beyond practical capacity, thus remaining limited in our ability to satisfy local demand for surgical services.

Demand

Demand for ambulatory surgical services in Catawba County is high and growing. In fact, the Catawba County ambulatory surgical use rate exceeds the North Carolina use rate by 86%. Catawba County's ambulatory surgery utilization rate is the highest of all 24 counties in Health Service Area I. This is clear evidence that local residents recognize the valuable benefits of ambulatory surgical facilities in Catawba County. It also demonstrates why additional capacity is needed, and that one additional ambulatory surgical operating room in the service area will be well utilized.

Population

Much of the growth in local ambulatory surgical utilization can be attributed to the large and aging population in Catawba County. Catawba County has a higher percentage of residents age 65 and older than the State as a whole. This cohort of residents is expected to increase over 7% in the next three years. This far exceeds the overall population growth rate for Catawba County.

The large increase in ambulatory cases at Graystone Eye Surgery Center in recent years mirrors Catawba County's rapidly aging population. These are clear indications that ambulatory surgical services are important to and highly utilized by the 65 and older population.

As the senior population continues to rapidly expand with the aging of the baby boomers, and the demand for hospital services generally increases due to the Affordable Care Act, ASCs will become increasingly appealing as an inexpensive and efficient conduit to provide care and meet increasing demand.

Safety & Quality, Access and Value

Our request is consistent with the SMFP's three basic principles of quality, access, and value. If our petition is approved, Catawba County residents will have improved and more timely access to locally performed outpatient surgical procedures. In addition, approval of the petition will enhance the quality of medical services, while also ensuring cost effectiveness. Ambulatory surgery centers create maximum staff efficiency and productivity. Quality of care continuously improves as facility staff members enhance their clinical skills and training through higher utilization and repetition. In addition, changes in Medicare payments are likely to contribute to future growth cases performed in low cost, high-quality ASCs. Payors and patients typically pay less for procedures performed in a freestanding surgery center than for comparable procedures in the hospital setting. This is important as the rising cost of healthcare services continues to cause concern among many North Carolina residents, and is driving the on-going trend of ambulatory surgical utilization in Catawba County ASCs and declining use of hospital-based ORs.

In closing, we believe there is a clear need for an additional operating room in Catawba County. We hope you will approve our petition for an adjusted need determination.

Thank you for providing us with the opportunity to discuss this important community issue.