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Veterans' hospital unlikely in Greer, VA official says
Area vets call services here inadequate

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GREER -- It is unlikely Allen Bennett Hospital will be used for veterans, a federal Veterans Affairs official said Friday.

Larry Biro, director of the VA Southeast Network, said a plan developed four years ago outlines the agency's expansion of services over the next 10 years.

The plan doesn't include a full, inpatient facility. Biro said.

The plan for the Upstate included a new outpatient clinic in Spartanburg, contracting for 10 inpatient beds through a health-care provider and expanding specialty services, such as prosthetics and ophthalmology.

Advertisement Biro and Brian Heckert, director of the Wm. Jennings Bryan Dorn Medical Center in Columbia, toured the hospital Friday with John Mansure, interim president of Allen Bennett; and members of Greer City Council and Greenville County Council.

Local veterans expressed frustration with medical services in the Upstate. William Robinson, the commander of the Greenville chapter of Disabled American Veterans, told VA officials his group regularly drives veterans to the VA hospital in Columbia.

"There's more veterans than we've got room in the van to take down there," Robinson said.

David Brennan called the Greenville outpatient clinic "a cut above a drug store."

But Biro said the comprehensive plan would meet the needs of area veterans, calling it "the fairest way of approaching the limited funds we have."

Biro said the agency hasn't accepted a vacant hospital building since the World War II-era but receives such offers frequently.

Allen Bennett is scheduled to close in 2008 after the new Greer Medical Campus opens.

State Sen. Lewis Vaughn, R-Greer, said he was disappointed to hear Biro's assessment and will continue to push the state's federal delegation to lobby for a VA hospital at Allen Bennett.

U.S. Rep. Bob Inglis said he wanted VA officials to be fully aware of what was available at Allen Bennett but any decision should be based on need rather than politics.
