


# Rush Oak Park Hospital to keep Catholic abortion policy

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Rush University Medical Center has agreed to continue to enforce the Catholic policy against abortions at Rush Oak Park Hospital after it completes its purchase of the west suburban facility.

The anti-abortion stance contradicts the public stance taken on April 10 when the two health care networks confirmed the deal.

In a joint news release, Rush and the seller, Wheaton Franciscan Services Inc., said that after the transaction was completed, Rush Oak Park “no longer would be a Catholic hospital.”

But in a June 7 letter to the Vatican, Cardinal Francis George, archbishop of Chicago, says “the new secular owners have agreed that no abortions will occur under their ownership.”

All Catholic health care facilities are required to follow church teachings that prohibit abortion, contraceptives, sterilization and euthanasia.

It's not unusual for Catholic bishops to try to impose church guidelines as part of a sale to a non-Catholic hospital, said Megan Smith, domestic program associate at Catholics for Choice, a Washington-based abortion rights group.

“Whenever we see someone bending the knee to theological issues rather than best medical practices, it's very troubling,” she said. “You don't want the bishop looking over your shoulder, or your doctor's shoulder.”

A spokeswoman for the Chicago archdiocese declined to comment, saying the letter was private correspondence. The letter was posted to the website of the Illinois Health Facilities and Services Review Board but has been taken down. The board approved the sale on June 26.

Before agreeing **to pay \$21.1 million for the 128-bed facility**, Rush operated the facility as a Catholic hospital for 20 years as part of a joint venture with Glendale, Wis.-based Wheaton Franciscan, which has 18 hospitals located primarily in Iowa, Illinois and Wisconsin and posted \$1.70 billion in revenue in 2012.

The May 23 sales agreement says that Rush will follow the Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services **guidelines** in six areas.

In addition to abortion, the areas spelled out in the agreement include the church's ban on the use of frozen embryos and euthanasia, were it ever to become legal in Illinois. It also says Rush Oak Park will comply with the underlying principles of the church's guidelines for end-of-life care.

The agreement seemingly opens the door to the use of contraception or sterilization, which are not specifically mentioned in the agreement but also are prohibited by Catholic doctrine.

A Rush spokesman declined to comment on whether those services would become available after the sale is completed, likely this summer.

The spokesman did say in a statement that Rush Oak Park will keep “the same level of clinical services” for at least two years after the ownership change. Rush Oak Park currently offers limited gynecological medicine and no obstetric services.

“The introduction of any new medical service would follow a thorough community market analysis regarding the availability and need for the service,” he said.

In the past, Chicago's cardinal seemingly has taken a more lenient approach to imposing all church teachings on the buyer of a Catholic hospital if the new name is not identified with the religion, said Lawrence Singer, director of the Beazley Institute for Health Law and Policy at Loyola University Chicago.

Terms of the sales vary, he noted. In some cases, contractual provisions give the diocese or a Catholic health care provider the right to sue if guidelines are violated. Writing restrictions into the real estate deed, though less common, also is done.

“There's not a canonical rule or anything that says, 'This must be done,' ” he said. “It's really all on the local bishop.”