

Hospitals 'facing a threat of closure'

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The claims follow news that health chiefs propose to shut a ward at St Luke's Hospital and move patients to private homes

Local councillor Doug Hall believes the cost cutting proposal is the start of the general running down of the NHS in Rugby which will end in the closure of the Hospital of St Cross

Rugby Health Authority faces a cash shortage of £272,000 and Cllr Hall believes it is too small to survive to the present climate of government emphasis on cost-effective

He is worried about the care the elderly would receive in private homes if about 25 beds are lost at St Luke's

But district general manager Peter Coulson said private homes may provide a better environment for some long stay patients

And he stressed that the closure of St Cross or the disappearance of Rugby Health Authority had never been suggested by health chiefs

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"It shows the running-down of the health service, which will be farmed out to private enterprise which can't provide the same service There's a tremendous danger that we're going to find ourselves with very inferior health care and I think we will have a fight to keep our hospitals

"As the smallest health authority in the country, there has been a question mark for two decades now whether Rugby's fixed costs are sustainable in terms of national government spending targets.

He believes the future of the health authority is in great danger It may be swallowed up by a larger authority and people will have to travel much further for treatment

Community Health Council secretary Tony Pits said the authority's programme for 1989 90, which includes the review of the beds at St Luke's, will be discussed at its next meeting

"The council will take a view on it but will have to be constructive in seeing what can be done about the over expenditure," he said.

We share Cllr Hall's concern about the care for any group in society, not just the elderly. But it must be seen in the light of the commitments of the authority, which can't overspend its budget."

He added that the future of the authority always had a question mark over it because it is so small.

But Mr Coulson said large health authorities are under the same severe financial pressure

He highlighted the amount of money which has gone into the Hospital of St Cross, which would be wasted if it closed

A new maternity unit and pathology lab have been built and tenders have gone out for the huge new Phase Three development

He also stressed that no firm decision had yet been made about the use of beds at St Luke's

By Rosanaund Laws

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