

IN OUR OPINION

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While pols slept, BMC fell into coma

If you live in Bayonne and have a heart attack, how soon you receive medical attention is critical. When an ambulance arrives — then what?

If this heart attack occurs anytime after Friday, where do they try to save your life, because there is a good chance the closest emergency room, at the Bayonne Medical Center, will be closed then — ordered shut by a bankruptcy judge.

Last week, U.S. Bankruptcy Court Judge Morris Stern rejected an offer by IJKG LLC to acquire the hospital for \$6.3 million and take on its \$12.5 million debt. There's always Greenville Hospital, but this facility is also struggling to survive. Should the heart attack occur at the far end of the peninsula, you are in big trouble. Then there is Greenville's big sister, the Jersey City Medical Center, Downtown Jersey City. Good luck if it is rush hour.

You are getting the picture of what this hospital means to Bayonne — life and death.

This newspaper has never been in favor of government bailing out private businesses. It did not support an attempt in North Hudson to take over a then-floundering New York Waterway ferry system, and there was little enthusiasm for a local bailout of what was then St. Mary Hospital, now called Hoboken University Medical Center.

The ferry still exists thanks to private enterprise and Hoboken floated \$52 million in bonds to save its hospital, although it will likely take a decade to determine whether it was a wise choice.

A major difference between the Hoboken situation and Bayonne's is that Hoboken made a choice. Its government tried to do something early enough to make a difference.

Bayonne officials were asleep while the hospital drowned. There is little the people can do to help a private institution other than collect petitions and beg for government intervention. When it came, it was too little and too late.

Yes, the hospital did not get enough charity reimbursements from the state. Anyone without insurance, whether they've got a headache or need major surgery, is treated.

It is the hospitals' trustees, supposedly an influential bunch, who were charged with keeping an eye on the health of this hospital over the years. They should have at least asked whether this hospital was becoming a cash cow for some? Certainly there were a number of incestuous relationships. Contracts went to the politically connected, but when politics was needed to save the hospital, it came only when the institution was in a coma.