

# urges nurse accord

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SANTA CRUZ — County supervisors will urge Dominican Hospital officials to come to a "mutually satisfactory agreement" with nurses and avoid a strike.

In a unanimous vote Tuesday, supervisors directed County Administrative Officer Susan Mauriello to contact hospital officials about the supervisors' wish that a strike be averted.

"We are pleased with that," said hospital spokeswoman Penny Jacob. "That is totally in agreement with everything we want to accomplish."

A handful of nurses also spoke at the Santa Cruz City Council meeting Tuesday night, urging the council to ask Dominican to come to an agreement with the nurses to stave off a strike.

The council took no action.

Councilman Mike Rotkin, however, told the nurses that while it wouldn't be appropriate for the council to get involved in the details of negotiations, he believes the council does want fair labor talks to take place. Rotkin said he plans to ask the council to make a statement about the Dominican labor issue at its next meeting in two weeks.

During the supervisors' meeting, nurse Tom Landig made allegations about Dominican's plans to bring in replacement nurses in case of a strike.

With contract negotiations at an impasse, nurses gave the hospital a 10-day notice Friday that they intend to strike. Before a walk-out is called, however, nurses belonging to the California Nurses Association will vote again.

In requesting supervisors contact Dominican, San Lorenzo Valley Supervisor Fred Keeley said the county has "a clear interest in seeing ... that the matter be settled in a fair and equitable way."

The county, Keeley noted, has had contracts with the hospital to provide services ever since it closed the last ward at the county hospital in 1983.

The county also must see that 22,000 residents receiving Medi-Cal benefits have access to hospital services, most of which they receive through the Dominican emergency room, Keeley added. And as one of the largest local employers, the county needs to be assured those covered by the county's health insurance can get medical services at Dominican, he said.

Approximately 75 nurses and

## Nurses, hospital

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their supporters filled the board room to show their support for the board action.

"Please adopt this," said nurse Barbara Williams, who has worked for Dominican for 12 years and is on the nurses' negotiations team. "It is very important to all of us that services don't get interrupted at Dominican Hospital."

But another nurse, Judy Downs, said she is among 75 nurses out of approximately 398 employed by Dominican who have signed a petition to decertify the union. "We also believe Dominican has acted in good faith and has addressed all the issues," she said.

Landig outlined a list of concerns the nurses have about U.S. Nursing Corp., which will supply nurses in case of a strike.

After the meeting, Daniel Mordecai, president and chairman of the Colorado-based corporation, denied most of the allegations.

Landig alleged that U.S. Nursing Corp.:

- Is the subject of a federal investigation for its use of unqualified nurses;

- Has been involved in bankruptcy proceedings since 1991;

- Has had the federal government, on behalf of the IRS, try to close it down because of non-payment of taxes;

- Was found by the state Department of Health to have 400 instances of incomplete documentation of nurses' basic credentials during the Summit Hospital strike in Oakland;

- Was the subject of a special field hearing by U.S. Reps. Tom Lantos and Ron Dellums to investigate unsafe patient conditions inside Summit Hospital.

Landig also alleged that some nurses employed by U.S. Nursing Corp. could potentially be in violation of the California Labor Code if they work at Dominican during a strike. State law prohibits the use of a professional strikebreaker, defined as someone who has crossed two or more picket lines in the last five years.

Mordecai admitted his company has filed bankruptcy. "We have paid all our bills and

our employees currently and expect to be out of Chapter 11 (bankruptcy) this year," he said.

He also confirmed that Dellums and Lantos held a hearing. "What came out of it was absolutely nothing. They had no authority to do anything," he said.

Mordecai denied his company has been investigated by the federal government or the federal government has tried to close company down.

As for the allegation the state has cited the company, he said it is in good standing with the state. "What may be factual ... is there might be something missing from the file and they call that a citation," he said.

Mordecai dismissed the law against professional strikebreakers.

"The law exists in virtually every industrialized state, but it has never been able to be enforced ... It is used to intimidate people who want to work hard in their professions and provide services."

Sentinel staff writer Katherine Edwards contributed to this report.