

# CF - Visiting Nurses Urgently Plea for Help

## Local Visiting Nurses Association Face Cuts

by Dick Little

**A**n urgent plea to the public from the Visiting Nurses Association for financial help. The organization suffered a major funding cut in January from the Federal Government, and they may have to stop seeing indigent patients, which includes some medi-cal patients.

Executive Director, De-lorme McKee-Stoval, explained the crises this way: In October, Congress authorized an increase in funding of 14.5% (after five years of no increases) to providers of in home service care. They took the action after getting a study outlining rising costs to many providers.

However, only 40% of the programs nation wide were "qualified," including Santa Cruz, while 60% of the programs were ordered to cut back their programs because of alleged "problems" outlined in the study. That brought cries of "foul" from effected Congressmen, who managed to get their colleagues to roll back some of the increase, so all organizations could enjoy an equal jump in revenues.

On top of that, Gramm-Rudman budget demands forced an additional 2% cut back, leaving V.N.A. with a

6.7% increase for the year.

The catch 22 comes into play when the effected patients are taken out of the V.N.A. program, they may have to go back into a hospital, at a cost of better than \$1,000 a day. Medi-Cal pays 72% of the cost of the program.

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McKee-Stoval says it costs V.N.A. an average of \$1,800 to cover a patients needs for 45 days at home. If the patient has to go back to the hospital, the cost runs over \$45,000 for the same period.

It turns out, according to McKee-Stoval, the County is not obligated to pay for in home care under State law. They are only obligated for hospital care. If the V.N.A. is forced to cut it's programs, there will be a dramatic increase in county costs.

"The State and Federal Governments are not picking up their fair share," according to McKee-Stoval, "and because of the recent cut backs, we can no longer afford to absorb the costs!"

V.N.A. has a forty year tradition of taking care of indigents in Santa Cruz County, but the organization now needs more community support. McKee-Stoval said the V.N.A. is asking for a supplemental grant from the United Way, which is already aiding the organization. They will also seek additional funds from the County, and the Community Foundation.

The County's four cities will also be asked to help with indigent care.

"We are the only private non-profit group conducting in-home health care," McKee-Stoval said, "we approached the Dominican

Foundation, but found out their by-laws prohibit any contributions to outside health groups beyond the hospital."

As many as 600 of V.N.A.'s 5,000 patients could be effected by the roll back. McKee-Stoval said if patients are on medi-cal or medi-care, they cannot be charged by V.N.A. to cover additional costs.