



Photo by Warren Roll

Dr. Ken Koenig, director of Dominican Hospital's Mental Health Services, confers with county and hospital officials during dedication ceremonies Monday.

## Health facility dedicated

By BOB SMITH

Dominican Hospital opened the doors of its new 28-bed, \$3 million mental health unit to the public for the first — and perhaps last — time on Monday.

The occasion was the formal dedication and blessing of the new facility which replaces an 18 bed county-operated unit in the old County Hospital a mile away.

The building is the result of a three-year cooperative process between the hospital and the county that began in 1980 when the county realized that its 18-bed facility — the only such unit in the county — was becoming inadequate for the demand and many private patients were forced to go outside the county for treatment.

The project was hailed by every speaker at the dedication ceremonies, including California Lt. Gov. Leo T. McCarthy.

Other speakers were Ralph Bargetto, vice president of the Dominican board of directors, County Supervisors chairman Joe Cucchiara, and Sister Judith Nelson, Prioress of the Adrian Dominican Congregation.

The facility was formally dedicated and blessed by The Rev. Thaddeus Shubsda, Bishop of the Monterey Diocese.

Missing from the ceremonies was the key figure in the negotiations between the hospital and county to bring the facility into being — Sister Josephine Sullivan, president of the hospital's board of directors.

She was confined to the hospital with a broken shoulder and pelvis — the result of a bicycle accident last Saturday.

The new facility will start accepting patients Monday morning. Once patients move into the unit, it will become a locked, security area with access restricted and movement inside the building somewhat curtailed.

An airy, modern facility, the unit is divided into two sections, each capable of accommodating 14 patients with varying degrees of mental illness and care needs.

The rooms are generally the same as a standard semi-private hospital room with two patients sharing each room and a common toilet.

Day rooms and television lounges are provided on each side of the central nursing station.

Enclosed open air patios and recreation areas provide patients and staff with a chance to get a breath of fresh air and engage in physical exercise, including basketball.

Meals, brought to the unit from the main hospital building a few dozen yards away, will be served in a canteen-like eating area that also features automatic coffee makers and small refrigerators for between-meal snacks.

There are two "quiet rooms" — stark cubicles where the floors and walls are lined with a thick foam rubber-like substance — where violent patients can be confined for varying periods of time under frequent observation by nurses and other hospital staff members.

With the exception of the quiet rooms, the individual hospital rooms and the showers and baths, every area where patients will normally be allowed can be observed from the central nursing station.

Dr. Kenneth Koenig, the hospital's mental health director, told reporters that the facility is designed as a short-term care facility, where patients would stay for 7-14 days. During that time, Koenig and other professionals will diagnose their needs and problems and either refer them to private psychiatrists and psychologists who can treat them on an outpatient basis, or transfer them to other facilities for long-term care.

Unlike the old county-operated psychiatric facility on Emeline Street, the Dominican unit will not accept any County Jail inmates who also need psychiatric services.

Once the county jail is expanded, there will be a 12 bed in-jail unit capable of treating jail prisoners. Until that addition is completed, Koenig told reporters, some inmates will be treated at the jail by a county psychiatrist and others, with more severe illnesses, will be housed at either Napa or Atascadero state hospitals.