

Sutter's Newest Hospital Hosts Opening Ceremonies

First Patients Aren't Expected to Arrive Until March At Mid-County Maternity and Surgery Hospital

by Mary Bryant and
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On January 25, officials from Sutter Health cut the ribbon on their newest acute care hospital in Northern California. The 30-bed Sutter Maternity and Surgery Center is a modern, acute care hospital. The cost of construction has been reported at \$23 million.

"This is what you as a community wanted," Van Johnson, Sutter/CHS Chief Executive Officer said at an opening ceremony attended by community leaders. Van Johnson had flown into Watsonville Airport for the ceremony. "This is the result of what you as community members wanted to have."

Van Johnson help cut the ribbon with local Board of Trustees Chairwoman Ceil Cirillo, along with local politicians and doctors from Sutter's Santa Cruz Medical Clinic.

Santa Cruz Medical Clinic's Dr. Mark Wainer, Chief of Staff of Sutter's new hospital also presided at the brief event.

The opening marked the beginning of a three day period during which members of the public were able to tour the 63,000 square foot facility. However, most of the facility's rooms remained empty of equipment. The facility's furnishings will be delivered later in the month.

The mini-hospital includes a towering circular entrance with oversized hallways and patient rooms, including 12 suites set up for birthing. Rooms interiors include hardwood floors and private balconies.

During opening ceremonies Santa Cruz Supervisor Walt Symons expressed his appreciation to Sutter for supporting the construction of the additional hospital.

"I want to thank Sutter for the beauty and the love and the caring that is going to come out of here in the future," Symons said.

However, not everyone



attending the invitation-only event was pleased about the opening of the county's third acute care hospital.

Protestors Show Up for Opening

About 100 abortion protestors lined the sidewalk outside the new Sutter facility. It was organized by Rev. Dale Wenger, the president of Voice for Life. The organization press officer Suzanne Stockwell said the group was protesting because of advance publicity for the facility that involved references to the facility offering choices for women including second trimester abortions. Like most other acute care facilities in the state, women seeking routine first trimester abortions will be treated in Sutter's outpatient facilities that are part of the Medical Clinic offices.

"It's such a hypocrisy to be saving the life of a pre-term baby on one side of the hospital and killing the same age baby on the other side," Stockwell said. "Hospitals need to be a place of healing, not killing."

However, despite Stockwell's claims, Sutter will not be serving the needs of prematurely born infants. As a limited service hospital, the facility does not have an intensive care nursery. Should difficulties arise during or immediately follow-

ing birth, Sutter will transfer patients to nearby Dominican Santa Cruz Hospital.

Sutter officials expect to have licensure completed by the end of the month and will begin treating the first patients in March.

Not Much of Issue

While the issue of choice has gained Sutter local support and protest, the facility's medical bylaws are similar to those of the two other community hospitals in town, Watsonville Community and Dominican Hospitals.

During public hearings before the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors, administrators from both hospitals were more concerned that diluting the acute care market would mean full-service hospitals would have difficulty remaining profitable in order to maintain departments supporting services like around-the-clock emergency care.

Dominican Hospital has reported a net cash increase of \$4.4 million during the last three years of operations. After deducting capital expenses and long term debt reduction in 1995, Dominican Hospital posted a loss of \$1.2 million. In years that the hospital has posted gains, funds are returned to operating accounts. □