

HOSPITALS - Dominican Hospital

Dominican, nurses continue struggle

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SANTA CRUZ — Talks between Dominican Hospital officials and nurses abruptly broke down Friday morning when they were unable to make headway over the issue of union representation, negotiators said.

Hospital spokeswoman Penny Jacobi said Dominican's negotiating attorney met with the federal mediator and a California Nurses Association negotiator for about an hour, only to have the mediator

call the session to a halt.

"He told them both to go back and think about it," Jacobi said. Another session was scheduled for this morning.

According to nurse negotiator Tom Landig, the nurses were told by the hospital's negotiating attorney Friday that he had nothing new to offer until he met with the Dominican board Friday night.

Frustrated nurses who showed up for the talks asked why the new session was scheduled when the hospital negotiator knew he wouldn't have anything to propose.

"A lot of nurses expected something. We wanted to hear something. This is a major disappointment," said nurse Peg Mayer.

About 20 nurses came to the bargaining talks Friday, many of whom said they had taken time off without pay and had made arrangements for others to work for them to be able to attend.

The lack of a new proposal by the hospital administration, which had requested the mediation session, was a slap, the nurses charged.

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"I feel betrayed, jerked around, a lack of respect," said Sigrid Lonngberg, a negotiator and orthopedic nurse. "It's infuriating."

Nurses had hoped to be in a strong negotiating position Friday, following a strike vote Thursday that showed 71 percent of voting registered nurses in support of a walkout.

"Nurses have shown very clearly by a large majority that they want an agency shop," said Barbara Williams, a mental health nurse.

Several speculated that by asking for the mediation session, then not meeting, the hospital had tried to sway the strike vote taken Thursday.

Hospital spokeswoman Penny Jacobi said the timing of the meeting was set by the mediator, not the hospital negotiators. "We just made ourselves available," she said. "There's only so much time between now and the strike deadline."

Jacobi confirmed that "no trespassing" signs were posted Friday at both Dominican and the former Community Hospital site, which is

now owned by Dominican.

She emphasized that the hospital does not anticipate any problems with picketers, but is following legal advice.

"We're doing what we need to do to run the hospital," she said.

Substitute nurses have already been hired to staff the hospital wards, along with Dominican's nurse managers.

Nurses at the negotiation session Friday said the wards that will be most seriously affected by the strike are intensive and coronary care, the emergency room, and the post-operative recovery and oncology wings.

Those areas have the most union supporters, and require an expertise and familiarity that nurses said they fear their replacements won't have.

"Walking into ICU is like looking into a foreign country," said Williams. "And I've had surgical training."

Williams said the aborted talks had dashed her hopes for averting a strike. "This morning if you had asked me I was feeling more hopeful. But this is really a kick. I feel much less hopeful," she said.