

More hospital changes previewed

By TOM LONG
Sentinel staff writer

5-3-90

SANTA CRUZ — Emergency, intensive care and surgical services at Community Hospital will likely be discontinued and a nursing home and chemical dependency unit will take their place, the president of Dominican Hospital said at a public forum at the Emeline Street county health complex Wednesday night.

"It's not going to happen overnight," said Sister Julie Hyer. "It could take as much as two years."

Hyer, who said Dominican's board of directors still had to approve the plan, made the announcement minutes before audience members raised a plethora of questions about Dominican's purchase of its chief rival and representatives of county commissions called for concessions from the Catholic hospital.

"It will be a glorified nursing home, which is just what we were afraid of," said Lucy Haessler, a resident of La Posada retirement home, which is located directly across from Community Hospital. "Community is a neighborhood hospital and that's what we need!"

The hospital's future was being discussed at a special meeting of the county's Public Health Commission. The Board of Supervisors asked the commission to host the

first public forum held on the hospital takeover and gather recommendations from other county commissions and from the public.

"This is an incredibly important topic for the community," said Ellie Hall, administrator of the county's Health Services Agency. "The purchase has changed health care reality in Santa Cruz County. There are opportunities for good and for problems."

Hall delivered a report on the

purchase of Community to the Board last month. According to that report Community had an average of 43 patients daily through most of 1989. Dominican, with 188 acute care beds available and an average occupancy of 110, could easily handle the extra patients, according to the report.

The report did not examine the impact of discontinuing Community's emergency room or intensive care services, but Dominican has

said repeatedly that it feels it will be able to offer the same levels of service that were available between both hospitals.

Dominican bought its main competitor for \$12.5 million on March 9, becoming the only hospital in north county and by far the largest provider of medical services in the county. The Catholic hospital announced in mid-January it was

Please see HOSPITAL — A12

Hospital changes

Continued from Page A1
considering buying Community from American Medical International and wanted to survey local

response to the idea.

In early March Dominican suddenly announced it had actually bought its rival. Following the sale

local officials were swamped with inquiries about the potential effects of the purchase. Dominican said that in purchasing Community it hopes to be able to better control health care costs locally by avoiding duplication of services. In the weeks following the sale a maelstrom of pro-purchase and anti-purchase arguments erupted.

The Federal Trade Commission subsequently launched an investigation into whether the purchase gave Dominican a monopoly on acute health care in the area. The FTC does not comment on investigations and no apparent conclusion to that inquiry has been reached.

Wednesday night members of county commissions repeatedly asked Dominican to reconsider its stand on offering birth control services, including tubal ligations for women giving birth by c-section. Hyer has said that such services go against Catholic beliefs and will not be available as they were at Community Hospital.

Commission members also asked that people of low-income and minority backgrounds be added to Dominican's board of directors and that board meetings be both publicized and open to the public. And a number of people asked for some kind of commitment from the hospital's board to make sure the hospital could not abuse its power.

"A formal procedure should be installed to monitor Dominican," said Betty Peterson of the Senior's Commission.

A number of speakers also said they remain worried about the lack of competition and what it may do to local health care costs.

"When you take away the competition, then you get what's left," said Bill Bonds of Aptos.