

HOSPITALS - purchase Birth-center switch

Dominican shutting down Community program

By TOM LONG
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- SANTA CRUZ — Despite a shower of protests from expectant parents who had not been notified, Dominican Hospital will stop admitting patients to the popular Community Hospital Birth Center on Aug. 9, and will close the center five days later.

And by Aug. 15, Community's emergency room, intensive-care unit and operating rooms will be shut, completing the transformation of Community from full-service hospital to a nursing home and rehabilitation center.

Dominican officials say the birth center is being moved because of a nursing shortage. But, as with Dominican's purchase of Commu-

nity in March, the speed of the move has some people upset.

"We were told it was going to be some time before this would happen," said Judy Parker, who is expecting her first child at the beginning of September. She has already registered at Community's birth center and taken child-birth classes there. "If they would have said three months ago everything is going to be moved over to Dominican, then we would have prepared ourselves."

"I feel strongly that we're getting shafted," said Parker's husband, Arn. "I know exactly how to get to Community, I know what door to go in. ... I don't know anything about Domini-

can."

The Parkers and other prospective parents said that they still had not been officially notified that the move was happening. Some said their physicians didn't even know the move was planned.

"We didn't get a letter, we didn't get anything. We still haven't received anything," said Ken Whelan Thursday.

Whelan's wife, Corrie, is due on the very day of the move, Aug. 9. "Nobody's told us to come take a tour. I don't even know where the birth center is (at Dominican)," said Whelan.

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Arn and Judy Parker feel 'shafted' they haven't been notified of the change.

Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Birth Center

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Dominican officials said Friday that all expectant parents were being notified of the switch immediately and being invited to come in and tour the birth center.

According to local obstetrician Dr. Howard Salvay, who was on the task force that planned the transition, the haste of the move was mostly driven by a local nursing shortage that made it difficult for Dominican to staff two birthing centers.

"All of a sudden we had this nursing shortage," said Salvay. "There just weren't enough resources.

"(The transition) has happened a little faster than we thought, but I don't think it's going to be a crunch," Salvay said.

A plethora of questions the expectant parents have should be answered during tours of Dominican's birth center. The plan is to incorporate virtually all the amenities of Community's birth program into Dominican's by Aug. 9, Salvay said.

The main difference between Community's birth center and Dominican's has been that Community offered large, private motel-like recovery rooms while Dominican's recovery rooms have been more like traditional hospital rooms where two patients were often only separated by a flimsy room divider and had to share a bathroom.

According to Salvay, the Dominican center will have 28 private rooms with private bathrooms by Aug. 9. Patients who are at Dominican for other gynecological procedures will be treated in a different area of the hospital and two operating rooms will be kept open exclusively for caesarian-section deliveries.

Salvay said the transition plan also includes building a separate entrance to the birth center, installing carpeting and expanding the nursery, all of which should be accomplished over the next two years.

So far, 26 of the nurses who worked at Community's birth center have signed on at Dominican.

Preparing for the change

SANTA CRUZ — The changes are coming fast and furious as Dominican Hospital moves to turn its former main competitor Community Hospital, which it bought in March, into a nursing home and rehabilitation center.

The transformation should be complete by Aug. 15., if all goes as planned. Among the major moves between now and then will be:

- Tuesday — No more elective surgery at Community.

- Wednesday — All ambulances are directed to Dominican's emergency room.

- Monday, Aug. 6 — Surgery, pediatric care and the intensive care units at Community close.

- Thursday, Aug. 9 — The Community Birth Center stops admitting patients. The Community emergency room closes.

- Tuesday, Aug. 14 — The Community Birth Center closes.

In the meantime, workers are tearing down signs, walls are being knocked out and entire wards are being moved as Dominican prepares to become the

only acute care hospital in north county.

The area that was once the hospital's outpatient cancer treatment center will soon house its emergency room. At the same time, plans to expand its existing emergency room are under way. Gynecology patients have been moved out of the birth center, and the Adrian Center for drug and alcohol treatment has already moved to the second floor of Community Hospital.

According to Larry Donatoni, Community Relations Director for Dominican, the hospital expects to be able to handle the combined emergency loads from both emergency rooms by the time Community's closes. Donatoni also said that a number of advertisements and alerts written in both English and Spanish will be sent out to area residents with information about the closing of Community's emergency room.

— By Tom Long

"It's going to be the same doctors, the same nurses and all that," Salvay said. According to Dominican officials, even the furniture from Community's birth center will be moved to Dominican.

Dominican bought Community in March, less than three months after American Medical International put the smaller hospital on the auction block. After buying its main competitor — a move that sparked an ongoing Federal Trade Commission investigation into the purchase — Dominican announced it would transform Community into a nursing home and rehabilitation center.

Earlier this month Dominican merged the two hospitals' heart-surgery centers and announced it would probably close Community's emergency room during the sum-

mer. The impending closure of the birth center was not announced at that time, but Salvay said the nursing shortage forced those plans to the forefront. And, Salvay said, he was surprised at how well the quick move was going.

"I didn't think it would go this smooth," Salvay said.

Still, some of the prospective parents might not use the word "smooth" to describe the transition.

"I have the utmost faith that the staff at Dominican is as good as the staff at Community," said George Rentschler, whose wife Rebeka is expecting their first child in September. "My only concern is that they haven't informed the parents. I just can't believe the lack of judgment on this one."