

Costs of hospital stay continue to grow

By LANE WALLACE
STAFF WRITER

The average cost of a hospital stay in Santa Cruz County increased to over \$5,000 in 1987, but the percentage increase was lower than either the national or statewide average increase.

A survey by Equicor-Equitable HCA Corp., a Tennessee-based insurance company, showed the average cost of a hospital stay in the country as a whole increased 19 percent in 1987, to \$4,551, mainly because

of increased costs for such ancillary charges as lab tests, X-rays, suture kits, oxygen and medicine. The Equicor study surveyed about a third of the nation's hospitals.

At Community Hospital of Santa Cruz, the average cost per stay increased 8.7 percent, to \$5,295, with an average stay of four days.

Dominican Santa Cruz Hospital's costs increased 9.9 percent to \$5,006, with an average stay of 6.3 days.

Watsonville Community Hospital was up 8.4 percent to \$5,254, with an average stay of 4.9 days.

The figures for local hospitals were compiled by the State Office of Health Planning, for the fiscal year ended June 30.

The statewide per-stay average was \$7,219, a 13.2 percent increase.

Equicor reported an average per-day cost nationally of \$698. The state's figures showed per-day costs of \$1,320 at Santa

Cruz Community, up 26.4 percent; \$798 at Dominican, up 9.2 percent; and \$1,071 at Watsonville, up 11.4 percent.

Equicor's study showed Santa Clara County with the highest costs in the country at \$1,487 per day and \$8,697 per stay. Three hospitals in that county were surveyed.

Chuck Boyles, controller at Watsonville Community Hospital, noted that the figures are what a hospital charges, not what it is able to collect from insurance companies and gov-

	Per day	% change	Per stay	% change
Community of S.C.	\$1,320	+26%	5,295	+9%
Dominican	\$,798	+9%	5,006	+10%
Wats. Community	\$1,071	+11%	5,254	+8%

ernment programs such as Medi-Cal and Medicare.

The hospital collects full billing in about 20 percent of cases, Boyles said. Watsonville gets about 72 percent of its gross billings, Boyles said, noting that the percentage has

been slipping in recent years.

Community Hospital of Santa Cruz's increases can be attributed to some "catch-up pricing" and the presence of some fairly expensive programs that the other hospitals in the county don't have, said J.A. Lindemann, chief operating officer.