

Hospital - Dominican Hospital

Dominican Plans Major Expansion

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Public support for Dominican Santa Cruz Hospital's proposed \$9 million expansion program has convinced the Adrian Dominican Sisters to move forward with the undertaking despite the difficulties, hard work and costs involved.

Sister Josephine Sullivan, hospital administrator, said Thursday to a big gathering of county officials and health care and business representatives from 31 agencies:

"When you have to tell patients who want to come to you for care that you have no beds, that they are all filled, it is not difficult to reach the conclusion that you have to expand.

"But we wanted to be sure we had the support of the people. The Adrian Sisters have been here since 1941 trying to serve the health needs of the people because we feel wanted by the community.

"So we commissioned an independent research firm to find out if the community wanted the expansion program. I was asked by them what our reaction would be 'if the answers don't come out as you might like.'

"Secretly, I was not worried about that. I felt that if the support did not come out then we would not have to do this extra work. But, of course, when the results came back, we were delighted.

"I feel honored to represent the Adrian Sisters in Santa Cruz."

The research survey conducted by the Decision Research Institute showed that almost 63 percent of the 500 households polled favored Dominican expansion, with only 11 percent opposed and some 17.5 percent undecided, as reported by The Sentinel Thursday.

Other data given to the big lunch crowd showed that of those favoring the expansion program, 15.3 percent cited the good service provided by Dominican; 21.8 percent had a number of generally favorable comments; 20.9 percent felt that freedom of hospital choice should be allowed; 46.3 percent

stated the expansion is needed because of area growth; 18.1 percent gave miscellaneous reasons and only 0.3 percent answered they did not know.

The percentages add to more than 100 percent because of multiple responses.

But Sister Josephine, Wayne Boss, associate hospital administrator, and Robert Swenson of the Dominican governing board stressed that project approvals must be obtained from health agencies and financing arranged before the construction can begin.

Boss said Dominican plans to make a two-story addition to the present hospital building for 47 medical-surgical beds, 53 skilled nursing beds, eight more critical care beds and six more pediatric beds. Ancillary service facilities would be provided, as well.

But a seven step process must be followed to get the legally required Certificate of Need (CON) from the state, Boss said. This process includes a public hearing locally by the Mid-Coast Health Systems Agency's fact-finding panel, and another public hearing locally by a state hearing official.

If all goes well for the project, the CON would be obtained at the end of Step 7, but an appeal of that decision could impose additional delay.

Boss said he anticipates that the MHSA will hear the project in this area in July.

Important to the CON process, Sister Josephine said, is the demonstration that the project is wanted by the community. Dominican wants all the approving letters and testimonials people care to send to the hospital to back up its CON application.

But some of the going became heavy for Sister Josephine, Boss and Swenson after the formal presentations:

Olivia Meredith of the American Cancer Society asked what would happen to Community Hospital of Santa Cruz if Dominican expands. "Is it going to close? If so, we would have only one hospital and we would have no choice."

Boss said: "I don't think it would close. I think

Santa Cruz should have two hospitals." Boss said that of the 114-bed expansion only 47 of the 114 new beds would be in competition with Community, the medical-surgical beds. He said Santa Cruz has 19 percent of its population over age 65, has a huge summer influx of tourists, has a big UCSC population, that the 47 beds are needed now and in the future because of these quite special circumstances.

Jean Ross of the Westside Neighbors Association asked "What parts of your indigent care agreement with the county won't apply if you fail to get the Certificate of Need?"

Boss said that the Dominican \$250,000 program of free care to the indigent would not apply, that the county would not have to delicense its 47 medical-surgical beds. But, regardless of the CON outcome, he said, Dominican would provide care for the indigent at the lower Medicare rates throughout the terms of the agreement.

Laura Giges of the Women's Health Center reported that some women who have had complications after getting abortions outside Santa Cruz County have felt they were not welcome in the Dominican emergency room, and she added: "It is not clear what effect your expansion would have on Community Hospital, but we feel it would be frightening if Dominican were the only hospital in the community."

Sister Josephine agreed that the hospital philosophy on abortions differs from views held by others, but she said: "I am sorry to hear they feel they are not treated well. In talking to our staff I do not get the sense the staff feels the women don't belong in emergency."

Sister Josephine said that operating a psychiatric unit with a low patient population had been economically unfeasible. As for the future: "Our expansion program is a longterm program and the mental health care need is immediate."

Boss repeated a Dominican pledge to participate in any mental health planning efforts with the county and other agencies.