

Doctors 'panic' over Kaiser's visit to local hospital

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SANTA CRUZ — Kaiser Foundation of San Francisco came calling on Dominican Hospital this morning in an apparent attempt to get a foothold in this county, and some local doctors "are panicking."

News that Kaiser was in town spread throughout the medical community swiftly, and doctors were saying Dominican had reached an agreement with Kaiser.

"They are panicking," said Dominican Administrator Sister Josephine this morning. "They don't know what they are talking about; there's no substance to it and it's strange that other people who don't know what's going on think they have the scoop."

She met at 10 a.m. today with two doctors from Kaiser Foundation "to hear what they have to say and nothing more."

"Nothing would happen today, anyway," she said. "These things take four or five meetings and have to go to the medical board."

Kaiser Foundation's "health maintenance organization" has over 2,000 mem-

bers who live in Santa Cruz County and they have to drive to San Jose for medical treatment.

Independent physicians don't like Kaiser Foundation, said Dr. Hans H. Dibbern, president of the Santa Cruz County Medical Society.

"I don't think they're very popular wherever they go. They usually bring in their own people — hired doctors — or sign up people in a restricted mold."

Dr. Dibbern was scheduled to have lunch today with the two doctors from Kaiser Foundation.

"All we can do is speculate about what they want. I think it will be more of an informational meeting. Kaiser established a foothold in Gilroy with a couple of doctors and they use a local hospital," he said.

Dr. Dibbern speculated that the two doctors might simply ask him if he thought there were any local doctors who would work for Kaiser.

But any statement that Kaiser already

has signed contracts here "is absolute hogwash," Dr. Dibbern said.

Kaiser Foundation spokesman Robert Hughes from his Oakland office said, "This kind of overreaction is not uncommon. Local doctors become quite concerned about having to compete with us."

He said the two Kaiser doctors are just testing the waters here "to explain what the possibilities are. It's a preliminary discussion and there's no agreement or contracts at this time."

Having a clinic of doctors here under the Kaiser plan and a local hospital that would contract to take Kaiser patients — as was done in Gilroy — could be what Kaiser has in mind.

Hughes said to the best of his knowledge, Kaiser is not opening talks with Santa Cruz Community Hospital or Watsonville Community Hospital.

Dr. Dibbern said, "That strikes me as strange."

Santa Cruz has one health maintenance organization — the Santa Cruz Medical Clinic.

Also, Lifeguard HMO in Santa Clara indicates it would like to set up in Santa Cruz County, according to Dibbern.

He says that health maintenance organizations are welcomed by the federal government as they contract on a set amount, but that he feels the HMOs have the potential of shortchanging the patient.

Since the HMO fund is paid in advance by the companies that contract for their employees, the more money saved on services, the more money left for profit, he said.

Sister Josephine said doctors today are on edge as the medical industry is undergoing "the same kind of changes that are happening in banking and the airline industry."

"The world is changing and people are concerned."