

Health Plan Provides Ammo In Hospital Battle

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A proposed five-year health systems plan for this area provides ammunition for both Dominican Santa Cruz Hospital and Community Hospital of Santa Cruz to use in their battle over Dominican's effort to gain 47 additional medical-surgical beds.

Analysis

The 1980-85 health plan was drawn up by the Mid-Coast Health Systems Agency (MHSA), the federally designated health planning body for Santa Cruz, San Benito, Monterey and San Luis Obispo counties.

The MHSA will be the first government agency to consider Dominican's application for the 47 medical-surgical beds now licensed to the county. The county Board of Supervisors has agreed to give up these licenses and support Dominican's application for them, but AMI, owners of Community Hospital, is opposing the license transfer to Dominican.

For Community, there is a big package of ammunition in the plan's reiteration of previous statements by MHSA that the health planning area served by Dominican and Community needs no more medical-surgical beds now and will not need them in 1985.

Using a complex formula developed by the state, the MHSA has computed that this area has a total of 328 licensed medical-surgical beds, that only 223 will be needed by 1985 and that there presently is an excess of 105 such beds in this area.

This formula uses the total number of beds licensed to an area, whether they are staffed or even set up. The 47 medical-surgical beds licensed to the county are neither staffed nor set up, hence are often called "paper" beds. But even if these "paper" beds are subtracted from the

total licensed, the area would have an excess of 58 medical-surgical beds.

On the other hand, the plan gives Dominican much ammunition to use, too.

For 1978, it shows that Dominican's 124 licensed medical-surgical beds (Dominican has a total of 150 beds of all kinds) had an average occupancy of 82.3 percent and that for the beds set up and staffed this was a 91.1 percent occupancy.

Dominican has since asserted it is now running at an occupancy rate of well over 90 percent for all beds and that more medical-surgical beds need to be allocated to it if the people of the area are to have a meaningful freedom of choice on the subject of which hospital to go to for a surgery.

Elsewhere in the five-year plan, the MHSA identifies as critical needs for this area facilities of a quite different kind: skilled nursing care facilities and inpatient psychiatric care facilities.

Since Jan. 1, the county Administrative Office and the county Health Department have been struggling to solve a number of health care problems here: care for the indigent, care for those who need long-term nursing and care for persons with psychiatric problems.

The county has contracted with Dominican for an indigent care program, Dominican has volunteered to include a 53-bed skilled nursing facility in its announced expansion plans, and Dominican last week announced it will build a 30-bed psychiatric unit and contract with the county to provide these services for public and private patients if the supervisors so desire.

In several ways, then, Dominican has offered to meet needs identified by the MHSA as critical. But to do this, it has been stated, the hospital must be given the 47 medical-surgical beds now licensed to the county. And the bed formula states in its present form that the area does not need to have those beds by 1985.

However, the MHSA may under the law be permitted to give special consideration to Dominican's application if its governing body rules the hospital is entitled to it because of its high occupancy rate, the huge population increases here in summer which affect the estimated 1985 population figure used in the bed formula and because of Dominican's announced plans to meet other critical health care needs, such as skilled nursing care and psychiatric care.