

Watsonville  
Planning  
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# Board approves money for Watsonville clinic

By JAMIE MARKS

The Watsonville General Medical Clinic won the unanimous support of the Board of Supervisors Thursday, despite some tough questioning by Supervisors Dan Forbus and Pat Liberty on its effectiveness.

Forbus opened the discussion of the budget item (part of the Health Services Agency budget which was approved by the board), by noting that the clinic appeared to be under-utilized.

"Is patient use of the Watsonville clinic picking up?" he asked Public Health Director George Wolfe.

"It's not working up to its fullest capacity," Wolfe responded, "but the numbers of patients in the clinic are up, as well as patients in the mental health clinic."

Forbus noted that the budget report

claimed that the entire cost of laboratory services are paid by patients, and wondered aloud if that was true.

Wolfe replied that it is true of the Watsonville clinic, but not the one in Santa Cruz.

Both clinics are run by the County Health Services Agency. They provide medical care to pregnant women, do lab tests, and outpatient service on a variety of minor injuries and illnesses.

The new \$532,623 budget is up some \$105,000 from last year's budget partly because of the addition of a full-time clinic manager and because of the continued funding of the maternal health care service, which was financed for only part of last year.

Mrs. Liberty questioned Wolfe on the number of bilingual staff at the Watsonville clinic.

He replied that out of 14 positions, 11 were held by bilingual workers.

Mrs. Liberty said it was extremely important to remember that it's not legal to recruit solely for Spanish-speaking workers. "While I think a knowledge of Latin culture is important, I want to be sure that in our recruitment policies we (the board) are not violating the law."

None of the board members commented on that, but Supervisor Chris Matthews took the opportunity to praise the clinic. Noting that there is a shortage of doctors in the area — especially gynecologists and obstetricians — he wondered how many of the city's doctors are now accepting Medi-Cal.

Wolfe responded that there are two new doctors at the clinic who specialize in pre-natal care and obstetrics.

"I had heard a rumor that one of those

doctors wouldn't take in Medi-Cal patients anymore, or was thinking of dropping them," Matthews said.

"It doesn't seem to be a problem," Wolfe replied.

Matthews asked if there would be a report made to the board on offering a sliding fee scale for patients who use the laboratory, which is financed solely by patient fees.

Wolfe replied that the proposal was already being considered (it had been recommended by the South County Task Force), and it would be brought back to the board in a few months.

Supervisor Gary Patton noted that the Watsonville clinic, located at 9 Crestview Drive, operates longer hours than the one in Santa Cruz and treats more patients. The Watsonville clinic is open for medical services from 12 p.m. to 7 p.m.

three days a week and 12 p.m. to 5 p.m. two days. The Santa Cruz clinic runs from 12 p.m. to 5 p.m. four days a week, and 12 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. one day. Watsonville treated 6,598 patients, while Santa Cruz saw 6,500.

"The Santa Cruz clinic is making a bundle compared to the one in Watsonville," he said. (The Santa Cruz laboratory alone took in almost \$100,000 more than Watsonville's lab.)

Acting Health Services Director Elinor Hall replied that Santa Cruz offers more services and also operates a pharmacy.

"Is there any way we could get . . . a pharmacy for Watsonville?" Patton asked.

Wolfe answered for Miss Hall by saying that it is expensive to set up the mechanism for operating a pharmacy,

as it would need to be licensed, fully stocked, and a pharmacist would have to be hired. "I think it's a costly venture for Watsonville right now."

Matthews added that there are already "plenty of people selling drugs in Watsonville."

Wolfe also noted that the Watsonville clinic buys some of its drugs from Santa Cruz, which gives the patients a chance to buy the drugs at a discount. He concluded his remarks by saying that there didn't seem to be a need for the clinic to have a pharmacy of its own.

Mrs. Liberty closed the discussion of the Watsonville clinic by saying she was pleased with the addition of two new "OB/GYN" doctors in the area.

The measure passed on a unanimous vote.

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