

# Heart Center OK imminent

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SANTA CRUZ — State Sen. Henry Mello said today that he had been advised by a state official that Community Hospital of Santa Cruz will get a go-ahead for its proposed heart surgery center next month.

"I've been told they (Community) will be getting their certificate of need," said Mello. He said William Wilder, chief deputy director of the Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development (OSHPD) had told him that the agency had "found a way to grant the certificate" by "targeting" Santa Cruz as a "special population area."

Mello said Wilder told him that the certificate of need, which the AMI-owned facility must have before it can proceed with its heart care center, will be issued to Community June 8.

The Watsonville Democrat's news came today as OSHPD Acting Chief Counsel John Rosskopf convened an "informal hearing" in the upstairs public meeting room of the Santa Cruz Main Library to determine if the agency's director has the "legal authority" to grant Community's certificate of need, despite the fact that a formal public hearing on the proposal, begun last December and almost immediately stalled by a lawsuit, has yet to be completed.

Community Hospital Executive Director Jean Adams paraded a series of witnesses — mostly doctors — before Rosskopf this morning to make the hospital's case for the cardiac surgery facility.

Essentially, the case boiled down to three points:

- There is a higher-than-average population of potential cardiac patients in Santa Cruz County.

- It is difficult and risky to transport

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**— Dr. Robert Kass**

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heart patients to Santa Clara Valley medical facilities for heart surgery and cardiac catheterization.

- Lives now lost could be saved by a local cardiac surgery center.

Doctor Robert Kass, who noted that "35 percent of all people who suffer heart attacks die before they get to a hospital," told Rosskopf, "Treatment (for heart attacks) must be administered as early as possible."

Kass, a Southern California cardiac surgeon who hopes to become head of Community Hospital's proposed cardiac center, said local heart patients are denied the most advanced cardiac treatment because of the community's "isolation."

"Santa Cruz is still practicing a 1960s brand of medicine," Kass said.

Other witnesses speaking on behalf of the hospital testified that the ride over Highway 17 is too long and that it is difficult to monitor vital signs and administer drugs to cardiac patients during the trip.

Local doctors also said it is sometimes hard to gain admission for their patients to San Jose-area heart care facilities.

This morning's hearing was held over the protest of the Mid-Coast Health Agency, which objected that OSHPD had violated state law in going ahead with the proceedings before the completion of the stalled formal public hearing.