

# ✓ Cardiac centers *HOSPITALS* merge

## Dominican director will head program

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SANTA CRUZ — The battle between competing heart-surgery centers is over: Community Hospital's center has been merged into Dominican Hospital's cardiac program.

"The people of Santa Cruz will have access to as fine a group of cardiac surgeons as can be found anywhere," said Sister Julie Hyer, president and chief executive officer of Dominican.

The consolidation of the two programs comes as a result of Dominican buying its main rival, AMI/Community Hospital, last March. The blending of the two programs ends a long controversy over whether the county needed two cardiac-surgery programs operating within a mile of one another.

Many critics charged that Santa Cruz County does not have enough patients annually to keep even one cardiac-surgery center efficient, much less two. When Dominican first announced it would open its center, just before Community opened its long-planned center in 1988, many local physicians protested, saying it was a waste of money and potentially dangerous to patients.

Some studies have indicated that cardiac surgery centers that handle a high volume of operations are safer than those that perform a limited number. Neither Community's program or Dominican's were performing enough surgeries annually to meet the state Health Department's suggested guideline of a minimum of 150 surgeries a year, but the combined program may satisfy that goal.

Dr. Lee Griffith, who has been the medical director of Dominican's cardiac surgery program since its beginning a year and a half ago, will continue in that role. He will be joined by the three cardiac surgeons — Drs. Noel Fishman, Merrill Bronstein and Alex Zapolanski — who had been practicing at Community's Santa Cruz Heart Institute. All heart surgery will be performed at Dominican and the Heart Institute will be closed.

According to Hyer, the combination of the two programs should result in immediate cost savings by reducing duplication of personnel and equipment.

Dominican also announced plans Friday to close Community Hospital's emergency room sometime this summer and move its drug and alcohol rehabilitation program, The Adrian Center, to Community Hospital July 25.

The moves are part of Dominican's plan to eventually move all surgical, emergency and acute care programs to Dominican while using Community to house the rehab program and a nursing home.