

Community Hospital Needs Community Solution

You've likely heard about the issues around the future of Doctors Medical Center (DMC) in San Pablo. Given the challenging patient payer mix, this community hospital has had financial challenges for many years. The West Contra Costa Healthcare District, Supervisor John Gioia and Contra Costa County staff have worked hard to make this critical hospital financially sustainable and have been able to reduce its losses from \$36 million in 2006 to approximately \$18 million today.

A mail-in ballot election is currently occurring in the healthcare district (which includes Kensington, Richmond, San Pablo, El Cerrito, Pinole, Hercules, Rodeo, El Sobrante, and Crockett). If Measure C passes on May 6, it would levy a parcel tax which will raise sufficient funds for the hospital to remain open. DMC depends on government and insurance reimbursements and property tax revenues to support it. Measure C would raise about \$20 million a year for the hospital, which would close the operating budget deficit and should make the hospital financially sustainable. This would allow the facility to pursue partnerships or affiliations with another healthcare institution to continue meeting the health needs of the community. If Measure C fails, DMC will close as early as July.

Critical Piece of Emergency Services Countywide

With its emergency room and intensive care unit, DMC is a critical piece of the countywide emergency medical services system. Our county doesn't have a surplus of hospital beds and we regularly approach the maximum intensive care capacity at hospitals during even moderate flu seasons. DMC's busy ER sees about 40,000 visits annually and serves, along with Kaiser Richmond, the 250,000 people who live in West County.

If DMC closes, ambulances will have to transport patients to emergency departments several miles further away and it will take longer to get people the lifesaving care they need. In addition, DMC is more than an emergency room. The hospital is also the lone provider of advanced cardiac care for heart attack victims in Western Contra Costa and serves as a stroke center, making it a major player in responding to all the emergency medical needs of West County. Minutes matter, and timely interventions in heart attack, stroke and numerous other types of serious illnesses will be delayed if DMC closes.

Closure Would be Devastating

It isn't a question of whether or not DMC is critical to the health of West County residents. A report commissioned by our Emergency Medical Services Division showed that DMC's closure would be catastrophic. It would mean the loss of one of only two hospitals in the West County region and the closure of the area's largest emergency room. This would place an enormous strain on already overwhelmed emergency services

in the county and could result in longer waiting times in other hospital emergency rooms in the area, with waits up to 12 hours long. Contingency planning is underway, but the results of DMC's closure would be devastating.

Financial Stability Needed

Without financial stability, DMC is unlikely to find a long-term healthcare partner. No potential partner has the capability to immediately fill an \$18 million annual gap. It will be necessary to secure the funding to stabilize DMC while a new partnership is sought to create a new, more efficient model of care. As a safety net hospital, DMC cares for patients who are mostly covered by Medicare and Medi-Cal, which does not reimburse the hospital for the full cost of providing medical services. The cost of care continues to increase and the rate of government reimbursements continues to decline. A long-term solution is needed to develop the appropriate model of care to meet the health needs of West County residents in the years to come. DMC is a critical asset for protecting the health of West Contra Costa residents and needs to be preserved.

Sincerely,
William B. Walker, M.D.