



Updated: December 01, 2005 7:22 PM MST

Farewell

County health director Thomas Garthwaite resigns [Local News, Nov. 30]! No better Christmas present could he have given the citizens of Los Angeles County.

Although much blame will be heaped on the Board of Supervisors for all the things they should have done, it was Garthwaite's failure to lead that was at the heart of the multiple health department failures. He was too busy playing his own game of politics, whining about how the supervisors were mean to him and hiding important information in what can only be seen as attempts to make the supervisors appear foolish (and they don't need help with that).

When such a war is going on no one wins and, as we saw, people can only suffer. The supervisors should now show the citizens of L.A. County some leadership and exercise one of the cornerstones of good management. Which would be to give Garthwaite the month of December as a gift, ask him to vacate his office immediately, and absolutely under no circumstances have him help in the search for his replacement.

And finally, the supervisors should call for the establishment of a Health Authority, like so many of us have called for all these many years.

Geneviève M. Clavreul, R.N.
Pasadena

Health director resigns

By Peter Prengaman, Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — The county's health director, sharply criticized for his handling of an embattled hospital that serves mostly minorities and the poor, resigned Tuesday to take a job with a large Catholic health care system.

Dr. Thomas Garthwaite said he informed the county Board of Supervisors of his decision in a closed-door meeting.

He said the decision was not based on criticism of his handling of Martin Luther King Jr./Drew Medical Center, an inner-city hospital racked by scandals and allegations of mismanagement and patient deaths blamed on poor nursing.

The hospital has lost its national accreditation in several medical facilities, and faces inspection next month by the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

"None of my decision was based on those problems," said Garthwaite, who has held the post since 2002 and oversaw a \$3.8 billion annual budget for health care across Los Angeles County. "This is just not a job you can do forever, and I found a great opportunity and I'm taking advantage of that."

Garthwaite said he would be chief medical officer of Catholic Health East, a Pennsylvania-based health system with 31 acute care hospitals along the East Coast.

In recent months, opposition among supervisors had mounted over Garthwaite's leadership, with complaints of slow reforms at the hospital and community activists have been critical of his decision to shut down programs at King/Drew.

Last summer, Garthwaite unveiled a plan to reduce patient services in pediatrics, obstetrics and neonatology. He also wanted to keep the hospital's trauma center closed indefinitely and reduce staff and services. The proposal would have expanded outpatient services including cancer detection and treatment, diabetes and high blood pressure.

Most supervisors opposed him, arguing the plans were poorly conceived and unrealistic.

Supervisor Yvonne Brathwaite Burke, who represents the district where the hospital is located, said she would have preferred Garthwaite stay until the accreditation issues were resolved.

Assemblymen Mark Ridley-Thomas, D-Los Angeles, said the resignation was a sign the county's supervisory health structure needed major repair.