

PASADENA STAR-NEWS

OPINION

A14 | pasadenastarnews.com

Sunday, December 21, 2008

Independent panel

Re your editorial, "Reopen King-Harbor" (Dec. 13): I can't agree more with your editorial's plea to reopen King-Harbor Hospital and I was pleased to learn that Supervisor Ridley-Thomas has made the reopening a priority.

However, as someone who's closely observed the slow death of this critical hospital, as well as one of the many critics of the Department of Health Services and the Board's persistent failures to remedy the many citations that lead to the hospital's eventual failure, I'm not sure getting the University of California to take over the hospital is the best option. First, the UC system is faced with many of its own problems, and several of its medical facilities are embroiled in their own scandals.

Second, it may not seem reasonable to leaders of the UC system to get involved in light of Harbor-UCLA's failure to help struggling King-Harbor back on its feet. It was during this "mentorship" that the tragic and preventable death of Ms. Rodriguez occurred.

The Board of Supervisors should empanel a truly independent body (comprised of not just professionals and

YOUR VIEW

experts but community members as well) with the authority and charge of reopening King Hospital. Meanwhile, every month, week and day that passes that King stays shuttered will make it that much harder to reopen — so the time is now to roll up our sleeves and reopen this much needed hospital.

Geneviève M. Clavreul, RN

PASADENA

PASADENA STAR-NEWS

OPINION

A10 | pasadenastarnews.com

Saturday, December 13, 2008

Reopen King-Harbor

WHEN Edith Rodriguez died after her agonizing plight was captured on videotape at King-Harbor hospital in Willowbrook last year, there seemed to be little doubt that her death — after writhing in pain on the floor of the waiting room — could have been prevented. And that Los Angeles County, which ran the hospital, would be culpable in her death.

Last week, a county assessment came to the same conclusion. We wonder what took them so long.

But L.A. County supervisors had taken years to come to conclusions about conditions at the trauma center that federal regulators — and patients (those who survived) — had come to years earlier.

Federal regulators, after multiple probations and promises by a board of supervisors who continued to profess shock at conditions at the hospital, withdrew financial support, finally forcing it to close.

The county has now offered the woman's boyfriend a \$250,000 settlement, and the woman's adult children are suing. In the kind of irony that could only have happened at Killer King, as it came to be known, the woman's boyfriend had called 9-1-1 as she was lying on the floor at the hospital that could have saved her life. In another irony, county police officers attempted to arrest the dying woman on an outstanding warrant because they felt she would get better treatment in jail.

OUR VIEW

Last week, the first new supervisor to be elected in the past 12 years took office, and it's not a moment too soon. Mark Ridley-Thomas, whose district includes King-Harbor, vowed both during his campaign and at a press conference last week, to reopen King Harbor by 2010. Meanwhile, supervisors are trying to convince the University of California to take over the trauma center and hospital. Currently, only a clinic operates on the site.

King, formerly King-Drew, was built after the Watts riots to serve the poorest of the poor. In its last years, medical mistakes and, in some cases, incompetence made King the trauma center even residents sought to avoid.

The best outcome for King Harbor would be an alliance with a respected medical school, such as the operations at Harbor-UCLA and County-USC. Once that is established, the process of hiring competent staff can begin. Reopening the medical center and trauma center would help lessen the burden on surrounding hospitals, and allow patients to get care faster throughout the county.

For too many years, King has been a political football, with white officials afraid to tackle its problems, and black officials vowing to keep it open at all cost. Ridley-Thomas is absolutely right in making King his first priority. We hope he succeeds where so many others have failed so miserably.