



June 29, 2005
Unchanging King/Drew

Murderous medical center must be emptied out or altogether shut down.

The sad chapters continue in the story of Martin Luther King Jr./Drew Medical Center, with no good resolution in sight, so long as it is run by the County of Los Angeles. But that could soon end.

Outsourcing, the polite term for turning the hospital over for someone else to run, now appears to have the support of a majority of the five-person Board of Supervisors. It is an unpalatable fate for the hospital's staff members and the South Central L.A. community it serves, but there aren't any good options left.

Despite assurances that things were getting better, the latest federal inspection has produced another list of horrors, including the questionable death of a patient and the removal of two nurses for misconduct.

The county has been trying for two years to clean up the murderously incompetent handling of patients at King/Drew, with not much to show for the effort. After spending \$15 million on Navigant Consulting for management oversight, real improvement seems no more likely than before.

The most recent federal inspection, completed last week, turned up the example of a patient who waited in the emergency room 13 hours without treatment, then died of an aneurysm, or torn blood vessel. A memo obtained by the L.A. Times said the aneurysm showed on an X ray taken at King/Drew two years ago but went undiagnosed.

The inspectors also reported that two nurses gave an epidural (injection close to the spinal column) to a 9-month-old infant, which they were not qualified to do, and did it without consent, then falsified records. The pediatric intensive care unit was closed after the incident because there were no qualified nurses to take the place of the two who were, fortunately, removed.

It's obvious what needs to be done at King/Drew: Get rid of the incompetent staff. But remember, these are civil service types, who are all but entrenched until they cause grievous injury or death, which they have caused all too often.

The only other way to get rid of them is to put the facility in the hands of an outside organization and start over. The hard question is whether any capable organization would want to take on this awful mess.

The alternative is to shut the place down, which is an increasing likelihood, given the findings of federal inspectors, on whose approval crucial funding depends. What a wasteful ending that would be.

The only thing worse would be to keep open King/Drew as it is.

Letter to the Editor

Long Beach Press Telegram

Thursday, July 07, 2005

King/Drew

Re: "Unchanging King/Drew" [Editorial, June 30]. For the past two years the county has invested more than \$20 million in consultants' salaries to make the needed changes. Two years ago they hired two separate firms (one specializing in JCAHO accreditation and another in nursing management) and neither seemed to make any positive change, and let's not forget that Dr. Tom Garthwaite, county health department director, and a team of health department experts were there during that failed year as well.

Meanwhile, Navigant and Dr. Garthwaite have had seven months to make corrections and all they have done was evade pointed questions, make statements like it's in progress, and paint a rosy picture to the Board of Supervisors.

Yes, there are problems at King/Drew, but an even greater problem lies with Dr. Garthwaite's failed leadership. So long as those involved in the ongoing failure still have a hand in King/Drew, real and permanent change will be almost impossible to achieve.

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