

# Over 600 Healthcare Workers Petition to Lease or Sell Marin General

BY MICHELLE ASCHWALD

A petition seeking the lease or sale of Marin General Hospital (MGH) signed by 110 physicians and surgeons, and nearly 500 other healthcare professionals affiliated with MGH was presented at a recent meeting of the Marin Healthcare District board (MHCD).

"The survival of Marin General Hospital is in serious doubt if it is administered by the politicized district board," said Dr. Harry Neuwirth, a urologist with the hospital for the past 18 years. "We respectfully ask the Marin Healthcare District to put a measure on the election ballot to lease or sell the hospital."

After Neuwirth's presentation of the petition, applause erupted in the Greenbrae hospital's conference center that was packed with over 200 people — many of them standing.

Neuwirth said that health care is exceptional at the hospital; but some doctors, nurses, therapists and other practitioners are leaving because the board administration appears chaotic and immediate action must occur to avert the departures.

"My heart is racing. We are screaming at each other," said MGH pediatrician Eric Scher as tempers and rhetoric flared during the long public commentary period by health care practitioners and concerned citizens. "We all have a common goal of quality medical

care and need to act quickly."

Because the petition expressed "no confidence" in a MHCD-run hospital, some board members and testifiers exchanged personal insults about why the agency is dysfunctional.

MHCD chair Sharon Jackson quieted the debate, "Comments about other people are out of order. I urge everyone to make comments pertaining to the topic."

(Due to the late hour, the board did not take up an agenda item dealing with improved conduct at meetings. If adopted, new policies would ban "loud, threatening or abusive language, whistling, hissing and stamping of feet" and "personal, impertinent, slanderous or profane remarks.")

Jackson considered the healthcare workers' petition and appealed to the assembly, "We have a public responsibility — if we don't have doctors and nurses left at Marin General, we don't have a hospital."

Robert Derzon, a former MHCD boardmember, who spent his entire professional life as a healthcare administrator, said that the board must build public confidence and provide a unified front. He said that he prefers district governance and is "dead set" against selling MGH. He does not want Marin to lose its voice and control of its only full-service community hospital.

MHCD boardmember Larry Bedard proposed that

a subcommittee be formed to hold public forums and determine which hospital management groups might operate, lease or buy the approximate 1,400-employee hospital. The resolution was passed 3-2 with board members Archimedes Ramirez and Jennifer Rienks dissenting.

Rienks said that it is not logistically possible for the board to analyze all of the options as well as the results of a \$370,000 strategic evaluation to be completed by Kurt Salmon Associates before August 10, the deadline required for the November ballot.

The board is examining the following choices for the ballot:

- District operation and ownership financed by a bond measure.
- Lease of the hospital to a management company.
- Sale of the hospital to a management company.
- District purchase of a new earthquake safe hospital property, also financed by a parcel tax.

Sutter Health will surrender control of MGH to the MHCD board by legal agreement as early as January 2009 and no later than July 2010.

The not-for-profit Sutter network has announced plans to expand Novato Community Hospital and purchase the Marin Square Shopping Center in San Rafael. ☺