

Opponents of MGH Governance Model Speak Out

BY MICHELLE ASCHWALD

A group of activists objected to a proposed operating board designed to protect Marin General Hospital (MGH) administration from domination by the Marin Healthcare District (MHCD).

During a special meeting at MGH on Tuesday, September 9, Jeffrey Hoffman, vice president of Kurt Salmon Associates (KSA), outlined the importance of an operating board that would oversee the day-to-day governance of the hospital.

"There has been an extreme 20-year history within the community that wants different things," said Hoffman. "We have to create some operational stability for the hospital going forward."

The operational board would be subordinate to the publically elected MHCD, which would set policy, maintain the MGH lease, have audit oversight and approve of new and subsequent operating board members.

Hoffman, a management consultant who was hired by the MHCD board to recommend a course of action when Sutter Health returns the hospital to district control before July 1, 2010, said that the operational board would broaden community participation.

An operating board might include 12-15 members with valuable hospital expertise and have the discretion to hire and fire the MGH CEO. The KSA-recommended board would create a firewall between the public's divisiveness and MGH administration.

"It's exactly the situation that exists under Sutter Health," said Dr. William Rothman of Belvedere. "The result will be conflict between district board members and members on the operational board. The hospital will be doomed."

Alan Blau said he was concerned that the new board would perpetuate itself. There would be conflicts of interest and it would not be objective. He wondered how to attract top qualified people to a district board that was powerless.

"Creating another board that is not transparent to the public will create many of the quality of care issues we had under Sutter's management," said Dr. Diana Parnell, who served on the MHCD board for 12 years. "This decision is being rammed through prior to the district healthcare election."

Neurosurgeon Dr. Archimedes Ramirez, a Sutter critic, who is seeking re-election to the MHCD board in November, said it is wrong to bring up the issue of governance before the election.

Candidates Ramirez and Dr. Frank Parnell, a ear, nose and throat surgeon, who are backed by the Coalition for Excellence at Our Hospital, oppose a MGH operating board because they want the district board to have ultimate control.

Incumbent MHCD board chair Sharon Jackson and Dr. Harris Simmonds, an obstetrician-gynecologist, who are sponsored by the Alliance to Save Our Hospital, favor separate district and operating boards.

There are two seats open in the race and unaffiliated Peter Romanowsky is the fifth candidate.

MHCD Director Dr. Larry Bedard said that the district has had a failed history of hospital management in a politically polarized environment.

The district will get only one chance to demonstrate management stability to financial lenders, who will advance the operating capital for the transition period, said Hoffman. He also stressed that it will be necessary to ask taxpayers to support a bond measure to construct a new hospital building and that staff recruitment is difficult when there is shaky governance.

"A number of citizens are concerned about MGH as a stand-alone hospital," MHCD Director Dr. James Clever said. "The doctors and nurses have no confidence in the district board as managers of Marin General."

Many doctors and nurses have signed a petition against total district oversight of MGH.

"If you want to bring the hospital staff along for a viable organization, you will have to separate the district

and operating boards," said Dr. Timothy Sowerby. "We don't want to be micromanaged by the district board. Marin General will end up poorly managed."

Sowerby, who is a gastroenterologist, expressed concern that the public would not approve a bond issue unless there was a firewall between the two boards.

Jackson said that there would be two more public study sessions - September 23 and October 7 — to flesh out the KSA strategic plans.