

To the Editor

Jan 15, 2007

There is no denying that there was a failure of Emergency Service Management in the handling of Mr. Campagna's case on Jan 3. It calls for an investigation of how these failures occurred and what has to be done to prevent recurrence. We can all be very thankful for Mr. Campagna's good outcome, made possible through the procedures and skill of the UCSF personnel and surgeons.

Several things in the IJ's story trouble me. Why did the IJ's reporter, after the Chief of Emergency Medicine and MGH management declined to comment, go to Dr. Ramirez for his views? Dr. Ramirez has a blood feud with Sutter and is an avowed hospital critic. Wouldn't it have been more objective to get the views of the Healthcare District Board Chair, or one of the other 2 Doctors on the board, one of whom is a respected emergency physician with over 25 years service in that specialty?

Also, the article besmirches the MGH Emergency Room. Only late in the article does it point out that the "ER saturation" is not solely an MGH problem but it is prevalent nationwide. My first hand experience the MGH Emergency Room is excellent. On about 6 occasions in the last 4 years I accompanied my wife in her visits to the ER. On each occasion my wife's doctor met us there and conferred with the ER room physician. After their assessment she was admitted to the hospital, once to the ICU. There were waits for hospital beds, once as long as 6 hours, but all through the waiting period she received excellent compassionate care from the ER personnel.

The article is also silent on a principal reason for the "ER saturation", namely, those without insurance and the indigent use ERs out of necessity for their primary care, and who can blame them? This produces a background of ER activity that affects the ER's primary mission of trauma care. In the short term the answer is continued attention to maximize ER Room efficiencies and communication. In the long term this can be mitigated by increasing facilities, personnel, and extended hours at community clinics. Those involved are working hard to do just this; a community clinic has opened in Marin City and the Marin Community Clinic has a major facility in the Canal area on the drawing boards.

So IJ, my advice is stop cursing the darkness, light a candle.

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