

Nurses warn community hospital may be closed

By Rachel Cohen, STAFF WRITER

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SAN LEANDRO — Grace Spiller and Yolanda Pineza, San Leandro Hospital medical-surgery nurses, went door-to-door Saturday to local businesses, warning of pending changes at the hospital.

"Sutter Health, which manages San Leandro Hospital, is planning to close or severely downsize the hospital," Spiller said.

In 40 years of nursing at San Leandro Hospital, she has seen the hospital go through some six management companies.

In making their rounds, Spiller and Pineza asked businesses to post a sign in support of keeping the hospital open.

"Any hospital closing, I think, is a loss for the community," said Allan Lee, owner of Dry Cleaning USA, as he took a sign and pamphlet about the Sutter Health service cuts.

Some 20 registered nurses canvassed the community to let it know of the danger it faces in possibly losing its hospital.

San Leandro Hospital has a 24-hour emergency room, 122 licensed beds, a heart-monitoring unit and an intensive care unit, as well as a rehabilitation facility.

Spiller added, "San Leandro Hospital has a lot of senior patients, and their families are old, and other

hospitals are too far away to take them to."

Jan Rodolfo, an RN at Oakland's Alta Bates Summit Medical Center and a member of the California Nurses Association, gave the San Leandro nurses a hand Saturday.

She said Sutter Health's management has been arguing that since San Leandro Hospital is not profitable, it should be closed and patients can go to neighboring hospitals.

There are no other hospitals in San Leandro, and the next closest ones are St. Rose in Hayward, Eden Medical Center in Castro Valley and Oakland hospitals.

"The trend is closing hospitals in underserved areas," Rodolfo said.

The nurses association is running campaigns on behalf of several other hospitals being threatened by Sutter Management where the patient community is primarily poor and not bringing in revenue.

These include St. Luke's Hospital, which serves southeast San Francisco, as well as Sutter Medical Center of Santa Rosa, which serves many agricultural workers.

These patients, like the elderly population in San Leandro, often are uninsured or have coverage under Medicare or Medi-Cal.

Carol Barazi, a San Leandro resident and RN at San Leandro Hospital for more than 20 years, said, "Theoretically, the area where you do make money should help fund the area where you don't."

She said the nonprofit Sutter Health, which bought San Leandro Hospital about two years ago, claims it is keeping the hospital open.

However, the company's commitment came into question during recent discussions about rebuilding the Castro Valley Eden Medical Center to make it seismically safe. San Leandro Hospital is up to seismic code.

"They stated publicly the option to change San Leandro Hospital into a rehab center only," Barazi added.

The nurses are all hoping Sutter will honor what it says about keeping San Leandro Hospital open.

State Sen. Ellen Corbett and state Assemblymember Mary Hayashi stopped by Saturday's event to show their support.

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