



County Turns Down Move Of UCSD Patient Beds To Thornton Hospital

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County supervisors unanimously endorsed a resolution Tuesday opposing University of California, San Diego Medical Center's proposal to move 385 of its patient beds in Hillcrest to Thornton Hospital in La Jolla.

County Supervisor Greg Cox, who put forth the resolution, said UCSD's proposal, under its "New Vision for Healthcare," would be "detrimental" to the availability of care, especially in the South County.

"With most of the patients coming from the south and central regions, it's imperative that a significant inpatient presence be maintained at the present site in Hillcrest," Cox said.

He said UCSD Medical Center Hillcrest's health care services are especially important in the wake of the sale of the nonprofit Paradise Valley Hospital in National City to a for-profit company.

UCSD Medical Center Hillcrest serves a high percentage of the region's poor and uninsured residents, according to Cox's office.

UCSD officials announced the plan two years ago. Portions of the proposal had been scheduled to be heard by the UC Board of Regents this week. But Richard Liekweg, chief executive officer of UCSD Medical Center, told the supervisors that the presentation before the UC regents has been postponed, pending further public dialogue.

"As we have said many times, UCSD is absolutely committed to making substantial financial investments at both our Hillcrest and our east campus hospitals so that all of the patients we serve have access to the highest quality of care and state-of-the-art facilities," he said.

Liekweg told the panel that \$80 million will be pumped into UCSD Medical Center Hillcrest to expand the emergency room, improve services and comply with state seismic standards.

UCSD officials have proposed a major expansion of Thornton Hospital by 2014, with 125 to 150 acute-care beds. Those beds would then be subtracted from the Hillcrest hospital. The remaining beds would be transferred by 2030, when another project in La Jolla is completed.

Liekweg pledged that UCSD will maintain at least 250 beds at the Hillcrest hospital until at least until 2030.

"Let me be clear, these investments include the operation of a full-service, approximately 250-bed hospital, level-one trauma center and burn center in Hillcrest for at least the next 20-plus years, when we will have to replace that facility due to the state's long-term seismic mandate and just general obsolescence," Liekweg said.

Supervisor Ron Roberts commended UCSD Medical Center for the decision to put off consideration of the plan by the Board of Regents.

Roberts said he has concerns about the resolution, but agreed to support it because it will get the public, UCSD Medical Center and all area hospitals "back at the table" on the issue of health care access.

"We need to get together and to build the best health care safety net for the people of San Diego County," he said.

More than a dozen people spoke in favor of the resolution and against UCSD Medical Center's proposal to move beds out of Hillcrest.

Cindy Gompper-Graves, chief executive officer of the South County Economic Development Council, said it would only "further burden an already fragile" health care system in the region.

"South County has a disproportionate amount of uninsured and underinsured and this, together with the rising cost of health care, has placed our health care system in South County at the risk of collapse," she said. "A move of trauma beds could place an even greater burden on our South County hospitals and might send our existing fragile system into chaos."