



Gavin Newsom
Mayor

Mitchell H. Katz, MD
Director of Health

January 31, 2005

Laguna Honda Hospital Executive Team
Laguna Honda Hospital Medical Staff

Dear Colleagues:

I am writing to apologize for my statements in the recent San Francisco Chronicle article. Many people interpreted my comments as pertaining to the entire staff at Laguna Honda Hospital (LHH). That is not true and I am sorry that the article gave that impression.

I was contacted by the newspaper reporter who was following up on data that had been sent to her. The data showed that Laguna Honda was accepting more short-stay admissions. I told her that I was pleased to hear this as it indicated to me that patients recently admitted from San Francisco General Hospital (SFGH) were being successfully reintegrated back into the community. This is good for them and also ensures that we have enough room to admit frail elderly. I also told her that from my view this was a "non-story" because both the LHH Executive Team and LHH Medical Staff had agreed to a new admissions policy and that the staff were doing a great job of caring for patients admitted from General Hospital.

She then asked me if this were true why was their continued opposition to admissions from General Hospital.

I told her that I believed a small group of people, which included persons who do not work at LHH, opposed admissions from SFGH because there was prejudice against African-American and persons with AIDS. I told her this was based on my knowledge that patients coming from SFGH were disproportionately African-American, and/or suffering from AIDS, compared to patients admitted from other sources. My view was also informed by the portrayal of an AIDS patient with severe dementia, whose major problem was falls, as a "sexual predator", and risk to the community. This hurt me personally very much as I have spent much of my adult life dealing with HIV/AIDS both professionally and in the care of people close to me.

I know that the vast majority of LHH physicians and staff have been working hard to accommodate the needs of all our patients, including those from SFGH. I greatly appreciate the thought and effort that went into creating a new shared mission and vision statement and admission policy.

In this regard, I apologize that I aired my feelings in the newspaper at a time when so much progress was being made. I am sorry to have disturbed this forward movement.

I think it would be useful if we all focused on ways of communicating without being hurtful to one another. I will refrain from making any negative comments to the media on this issue and hope that

others will do the same. I am also absolutely committed to working with you to obtain those resources needed (e.g., increased behavioral health planning, security, training) necessary to care for all our patients at LHH.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mitchell H. Katz", with a stylized flourish at the end.

MITCHELL H. KATZ, MD
Director of Health