

July 22, 2010

San Francisco dialysis shortage linked to chronic Laguna Honda Hospital rebuild indecisions

by Patrick Monette-Shaw
SF Examiner.com | **SF Health Examiner**

Originally published at:
<http://www.examiner.com/article/part-1-san-francisco-dialysis-shortage-linked-to-chronic-laguna-honda-hospital-rebuild-indecisions>

San Francisco's **dialysis treatment crisis is intimately linked** to other **chronic indecisions** about Laguna Honda Hospital's (LHH) replacement facility.

Is this "Code Pearl"?

As far back as July 2002, [San Francisco Bay Guardian reporter Tali Woodward reported](#) that Dr. Talmadge King, who then oversaw medical services at San Francisco General Hospital (SFGH) for UCSF claimed, "There aren't enough dialysis spots in San Francisco, and we're very worried about that."

Since then, San Francisco's dialysis situation has worsened.

In a *San Francisco Chronicle* article on June 2, 2004, [Rachel Gordon reported Mayor Gavin Newsom proposed eliminating the dialysis center at SFGH](#) as part of his FY 05-06 budget cuts.

At the time, some activists asserted UCSF wanted to increase its research facility square footage at SFGH, and hospital administrators were considering closing its dialysis center to free up office space for UCSF researchers.

The grassroots *Coalition for Public Health* convinced San Francisco's Board of Supervisors Budget Committee to restore SFGH's dialysis unit, assuming the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organization would allow continued operation of SFGH's dialysis center until a dialysis unit planned for LHH opened.

In 2005, the [Pebbles Project — a project of the Center for Health Designs involved in the LHH rebuild](#) project — claimed the new LHH would be adding dialysis services.

In May 2009, San Francisco's Capital Planning Committee indicated that a 30-chair dialysis unit at LHH may have been deferred from proposed capital improvement projects.

But on June 25, 2010, [San Francisco's Department of Public Works web site still indicates](#) the LHH replacement facility would feature a dialysis clinic.

City planners — including administrators at LHH and its design team — appear to be ignoring a [June 2007 California Department of Public Health ruling that providing dialysis services in long term care \(LTC\) settings wasn't authorized as a skilled nursing facility service](#), prohibiting providing dialysis services within LTC facilities, apparently even if outsourced to a third-party provider.

San Francisco Examiner staff writer Katie Worth published a piece Tuesday, July 20 [describing the lack of dialysis centers in San Francisco](#).

Enter into the mix, indecision by LHH administrators — in addition to the indecision about [LHH's morgue reported yesterday](#).

Initial plans included a six-chair dialysis unit located in LHH's new "Pavilion" building along with other specialty clinics. Then a proposal was floated to develop a 24- to 30-chair additional outpatient dialysis unit, possibly in the "C" wing of the old buildings that won't be demolished.



Plans for dialysis treatment at Laguna Honda Hospital remain mired in ten-year indecision.

Photo Illustration: Patrick Monette-Shaw

The dialysis chairs and services proposed for LHH, also seem to have fallen off of life support, however temporarily, victim to cost over-runs and lax construction budget oversight.

LHH administrators appear never to have been in favor of more than six dialysis chairs, but only for LHH's patients, not outpatients. As of today, no decision has been made about dialysis treatment at LHH, showing once again, the chronic inability of LHH's administrators to reach consensus on what services are actually needed, and for which patient populations. When the outpatient clinics at LHH open in late 2010 or 2011, there will be no dialysis services offered on its campus.

As San Francisco's population of elderly citizens age and increasingly develop end-stage renal disease without adequate dialysis services all over San Francisco, Katie Worth's quote of Ruth Nemesio rings true.

Nemesio, a dialysis patient, noted that if the city knows there's going to be increased patients facing kidney failure, they should think now about building out increased capacity to meet demand. Worth reported that Nemesio said "They wait to fix something until it's too late."

LHH administrator's indecision about providing dialysis services — in part driven by its construction budget cost over-runs — may prove to be a kidney-failure killer, since there's no money left for a dialysis unit in LHH's replacement project budget.

Before it's too late, are we at Code Blue?

Or at [Code Pearl](#)?

Feedback: monette-shaw@westsideobserver.com.