

## Nurses fight St. Luke's hospital cuts; San Francisco 30 percent skilled nursing bed shortage

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A coalition that includes the California Nurses Association is fighting California Pacific Medical Center's (CPMC) plan to eliminate skilled nursing services at St. Luke's Hospital.

CPMC's plans have outraged San Franciscans concerned about the 30 percentage shortage of available skilled nursing beds in San Francisco.

A well-attended rally held Thursday — sponsored by the California Nurses Association (CNA), the Coalition for Health Planning San Francisco, and the Good Neighbor Coalition — continues CNA's and other organization's efforts to hold Sutter/CPMC accountable for developing responsible plans to restore skilled nursing beds and skilled nursing services at its San Francisco acute care campuses.



Elderly San Franciscans attend nursing union rally opposing CPMC's cut of skilled nursing services.

*Photo: James Tracy. Courtesy California Nurses Association; used with permission.*

"Nurses, seniors, neighbors, patients and patient advocates picketed at CPMC's California Street campus on Thursday to protest the hospital's proposed master plan," notes Sherrie Matza, a leading Alzheimer's advocate in San Francisco and former chair of the Alzheimer's Association's public policy committee in California.

Thursday's rally brought seniors to the streets, since Sutter's plans to build its contentious Cathedral Hill Hospital on the current site of the Cathedral Hill Hotel on Van Ness Avenue at O'Farrell Street contributes to the decimation of skilled nursing services in San Francisco.

"When it comes to health care services that are so vital to our seniors and disabled, we will not trust CPMC to keep their word to provide these services after they are no longer making nice to get permits to build their destination hospitals," said Nato Green, a labor representative for the California Nurses Association.

CPMC's initial proposal submitted to San Francisco's Planning Commission indicated it plans to close 180 skilled nursing beds as part of its "institutional master plan," and continue operating only 38 skilled nursing beds at its Davies Campus location, most likely for short-term physical rehabilitation.

CPMC has proposed jettisoning 82 percent of its skilled nursing beds — its proposed 180-bed chop. The nurses union calculates this results in a 30 percent shortage of skilled nursing beds.

As this Examiner has previously reported, CPMC claims it will contract with other facilities in San Francisco to provide another 62 beds, but as I have noted, they will be supplanting services for long-term care patients, not supplementing the overall availability of San Francisco's skilled nursing beds.

The Lewin Group — which was contracted to prepare an analysis for the San Francisco Department of Public Health following a review of CPMC's institutional master plan, but which some observers consider a consultant to CPMC — analyzed demographic data in a June 26, 2009 report it authored.

The Lewin report claims that based on the projected occupancy rate of skilled nursing beds, and the percentage of seniors and their service utilization, San Francisco faces a 30 percent shortage above available skilled nursing bed capacity in 2020, just 10 short years from now.

The Lewin report cited state Department of Finance populations estimates made in July 2007 that San Francisco's total population in 2020 is projected to be 844,466, 147,607 of whom — 18% of the total population — are estimated to be over age 65.

Although the Lewin report may have contributed to tricking San Francisco's Planning Commission and its separate Health Commission, San Francisco's Board of Supervisors should not be so fooled, since by its own footnoted admission, its report noted any potential "understatement" — underestimate — of population estimates will "increase the projected SNF bed occupancy rate," apparently exacerbating the projected 30 percent shortage in 2020.

Indeed, the Lewin report notes that CPMC's plan to eliminated skilled nursing beds "does not support the potential city-wide [sic] need for skilled nursing services," a shocking admission that CPMC's plans will worsen the shortage.

The Lewin Group knows the actual skilled nursing bed shortage will worsen beyond a mere 30 percent. Its report also notes that "given the extent of potential need, a broader, city-wide [sic] plan will likely be need to appropriately address the shortage."

Guess what? We're back to the future, since we're already there.

And no citywide plan is under development.

Almost two months before the Lewin report's publication date, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported on May 1, 2009 that the state Department of Finance had released updated data showing San Francisco's projected 844,466 population in 2020 had already been surpassed in 2008.

The Department of Finance's new data documents that San Francisco's population had already reached 845,559 in 2008, thirteen years early.

How could The Lewin Group not have known about this before issuing its report, and why did it report Department of Finance data from July 2007 when updated demographic data from the same source was available in May 2009?

This may not simply be an error of omission, since it clearly exacerbates the 30 percent loss of skilled nursing beds ten years from now. We appear to have already gotten there, now, and ten years from now the problem will only worsen.

Does this sound to you like it sounds to this Examiner, that the Planning Department and the Department of Public Health may be trying to ram through the Board of Supervisors policy decisions based on three-year-old data?

"Viable plans for skilled nursing must be an explicit and binding part of CPMC's entire Institutional Master Plan approval process, and not the wink and nod we're getting now [from CPMC]," Mr. Green notes.

Nurses aren't the only ones concerned.

"Already, those with long-term care needs struggle to find a Medicare and/or Medi-cal eligible skilled nursing bed, leaving many with sub-standard care, or transfers far away. The crisis will only escalate as San Francisco's population ages," says Matza.

She continued, "Unfortunately, I don't see CPMC/Sutter Health as a partner trying to resolve these issues for the long-term. My trust in them is gone."

Matza isn't alone.

The San Francisco's Gray Panthers are very concerned, worrying about San Francisco's severe shortage skilled nursing facilities accepting patients covered by Medi-Cal, almost all of whom are poor elderly or disabled patients.

The Gray Panthers also worry San Francisco's insufficient skilled nursing beds is resulting in patients being placed in out-of-county facilities, away from the support of family and friends, and that already-scared skilled nursing beds may be causing premature deaths of low-income San Franciscans.

The coalition continues to ask why Sutter/CPMC would be allowed to continue putting elderly or disabled people at risk.

When CPM's plans for its Cathedral Hill Hospital goes before San Francisco's Board of Supervisors in September, the supervisors have an obligation to delay taking action until the broader, citywide plan the Lewin report acknowledges needs to be developed to appropriately address San Francisco's skilled nursing bed shortage is developed.

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