

Competition key in Malulani decision

THE CHAMBER VIEW

by Pamela Tumpap



On Jan. 8, the Kihei Community Association (KCA) and People United to Support a Second Hospital (PUSHH)

convened a panel meeting to discuss the proposed Malulani Health and Medical Center (Malulani) and the Certificate of Need (CON) process. The topic drew a huge crowd, with over 450 people in attendance, in overwhelming support for Malulani.

The panel included Linda Smith, senior policy adviser to Gov. Linda Lingle; Sen. Roz Baker; Rep. Joe Bertram III; Council Member Michelle Anderson; Dr. Lorrin Pang, Maui District health administrator; and Dr. Ron Kwon, chairman of Malulani Health Systems.

Asked to discuss the CON process, Sen. Baker provided an overview of this process based on 12 criteria, with the decision made on a preponderance of evidence related to that criteria and the burden of proof being on the applicant.

During her comments, Sen. Baker talked about the size of our community; saying Maui is a smaller community, and that we don't have the economies of scale to sustain certain services. She said we must look at services that

are "practical and prudent." She also discussed the importance of volume practice in providing quality care.

She said she did not try to stop Malulani from moving forward, but has expressed reservations.

Smith next mentioned that the Malulani denial has raised concerns (including anti-trust) from the Department of Justice and the Federal Trade Commission.

She announced that Gov. Lingle will introduce two legislative initiatives this session, including one to exempt Malulani from the CON process due to community interest. The other would significantly narrow the scope of the CON process in terms of the types of health care facilities covered by the process, change the order of the process, so that the process begins with the state's high level review and concludes with the local panel, change the weighting of criteria, and have reconsideration hearings take place in the local jurisdiction.

The news received a wide-spread roar of approval.

Dr. Pang, who sits on the CON committee and who has sat on other regulatory health care committees to review technical merits and validity of claims of health care proposals, said proposals should be judged on their technical merit.

Neither the FDA nor WHO (World Health Organization) have competition as a criteria and we shouldn't either.

He said competition is a good thing, and improves health care services. Concerns that a new

hospital will "steal" funds, grants, people and facilities is inaccurate; it will create new jobs, resources, facilities and improve services.

Rep. Bertram, a PUSHH organizer, said PUSHH was created because he felt the community was not being heard and the state structure does not make sense. He felt compelled to get involved and vowed to work to move things forward.

Expressing that the crowd was a testament to why "this" should happen, Council Member Anderson said, "Maui deserves first-class, state-of-the-art health care facilities. It's not a need, it's a right. The denial borders on criminal and was strictly based on competition. We need to let the free market bring everything up to a higher standard."

Champion Dr. Kwon explained that the local panel on Maui stated that Malulani satisfied all of the CON criteria. It overwhelmingly approved of the application.

"However, statutes are words and come down to interpretation. The issue of competition with Maui Memorial Medical Center (MMMM) is a challenge," he said.

A heated Q&A session followed the presentations, with many pointed questions lodged at Sen. Baker, asking for a "Yes" or "No" answer on whether she supports Malulani.

Sen. Baker provided consistent responses, sharing that she was "for the vision of Malulani," while noting that she still has

reservations. She described voicing her concerns as discussing the issue "Maui style" to work toward the best possible health care system.

All were encouraged to back the legislation to exempt Malulani from the CON process and the bill to revise the CON process.

The Maui Chamber of Commerce supports the provision of coordinated and cost-effective health care services to our entire community, including additional hospitals; primary, urgent, emergent, acute and long-term care; and new health facilities provided by the private sector.

Further, we support revision and/or repeal of the CON process — competition should not be part of the criteria.

This meeting was an inspirational example of how the community can come together to make their will known.

However, with growing frustrations on this and other issues, it's important to remember that rude behavior, personal attacks and polarizing statements are not helpful.

Negativity limits thinking, while positivity expands thinking and generates better, broader solutions.

There will always be differences, but let's be respectful, work cooperatively on health care and community concerns, and keep Maui no ka oi.

■ Pamela Tumpap is president of the Maui Chamber of Commerce.