

A second hospital for Maui: Where do we go from here?

THE CHAMBER VIEW

by Pamela Tumpap



In Monday's reconsideration hearing in Honolulu of Malulani Health and Medical Center's certificate-of-need

application, the state health panel voted 4-1 to reject Malulani's request for a rehearing of information for the proposed second hospital on Maui. The vote finalized the State Health Planning and Development Agency's (SHPDA) rejection of the CON application.

So, what will it take to get another hospital on Maui? Hours of emotional testimony were presented at the reconsideration hearing, and the only panelist to vote in favor of reconsideration was Maui's only member, Elaine Slavinsky. She spoke up on behalf of the community and said she felt Malulani had met the reconsideration criteria, providing new, relevant and significant information not previously considered.

In the initial disapproval issued in October, the SHPDA administrator, Dr. David Sakamoto, cited application criteria that prohibit new medical proposals from having a detrimental effect on existing health care systems. So, one wonders then, how any of the

other Neighbor Islands obtained additional hospitals. How did they get around the "detrimental effect on existing health care systems" clause? And, why are we currently the only county in Hawaii with only one acute-care hospital?

The application decline becomes even more dumbfounding when Dr. Sakamoto reiterated on Monday that "there's no question" that Maui needs more acute-care beds and could use a new full-service hospital as proposed by Malulani but then goes on to explain that he cannot approve the proposal given the strict criteria established by state statutes and SHPDA's administrative rules.

When the SHPDA administrator himself cites a need for expanded services on Maui, and says that the state statutes and administrative rules are preventing approval of the application, the process needs to be revamped! We played by the rules. We went through the process, but it didn't work. This decision affects our community. We, on Maui, should be able to decide if we need another hospital or not. It's time this bureaucratic process is fixed.

As People United to Support a Second Hospital (PUSSH) Co-chairwoman Victoria McGuire told *The Maui News*, "The CON application is over. Certainly the issue of a second hospital is not. We're certainly not giving up."

Neither is the Maui Chamber of Commerce.

The Maui Chamber of Commerce supports the provision of coordinated and cost-effective health care services to our entire community. Such services include additional hospitals; primary, urgent, emergent, acute and long-term care; and new health facilities provided by the private sector. We also support repeal or revision of the CON process, with desired revisions including local decision making and elimination of competitive criteria.

The issue of a second hospital on Maui continues to be one of many hot topics discussed at the Maui Chamber of Commerce. These discussions have resulted in the creation of our position statement (in the prior paragraph, above) and the issue becoming one of the chamber's top legislative priorities for 2007.

Thankfully, it's a top priority for others as well. PUSHH is continuing to forge ahead, and Gov. Linda Lingle and her administration are addressing the matter in their 2007 legislative initiatives package.

First, the governor has proposed a bill to exempt Malulani Health and Medical Center from the certificate-of-need process to allow a second state-of-the-art acute-care hospital to be built on Maui.

Second, the governor proposes revisions to the state process for

deciding what health care facilities can be built and operated in Hawaii to allow more hospitals, clinics, care homes, pharmacies and other services to be offered without going through a lengthy government approval process called the certificate of need.

And third, the administration seeks to allow local communities to have the final say on what health care services are offered in their area and requiring any reconsideration hearings to be held in the county where the proposed service or facility would be located.

We applaud these initiatives and encourage the community to come out in support of these bills. Let the reconsideration denial serve as your call to action. Tell your elected officials how you feel about Maui's health care system. If we don't make the push now and make our collective will known, we will allow an outdated CON process to box us in. A dead end may have been reached with one avenue, but we're at a crossroad and there are other avenues to pursue. It's time to repeal or eliminate the CON process; improve and expand health care services for our entire community; and have another hospital on Maui!

■ *Pamela Tumpap is president of the Maui Chamber of Commerce, at Web site www.maui-chamber.org.*