



Patient Lawsuit Alleges Inadequate Staffing

In a suit filed in Alameda County Superior Court, an elderly patient is suing Sutter's Summit Medical Center alleging that the hospital's short staffing led him to suffer serious injury. According to the lawsuit, Summit "consciously limited the number of staff and qualified nurses for the purpose of its economical profits. Summit also knew that the lack of sufficient staffing placed patients who were in need of special attention, such as patients requiring careful and constant monitoring, at an increased and high risk of injury or danger."

The patient, who had undergone spinal surgery at the hospital, was given pain medication that caused him to experience severe hallucinations and become uncontrollable. Because of his condition, the patient's wife stayed by his side as much as possible.

After feeding lunch to her husband last May 7th, the patient's wife alerted the hospital that she was going to eat in the cafeteria and that her husband needed constant monitoring during her absence because he "was suffering excessive hallucinations and was attempting to get out of bed and leave his room." Due to short staffing and the hospital's inadequate monitoring of the patient, the patient was left unattended and was later found to have disappeared from his room, according to the suit.

After a search, the hallucinating patient was found in a stairwell two floors below his room with a crushed ankle that was so severely broken that it was "flopping."

The suit alleges that, "Had Plaintiffs known of the true condition and hazards inherent as a result of Summit's lack of adequate staffing, Plaintiffs would have sought alternative facilities and/or provided separate monitoring of the Plaintiff."

"The lack of sufficient staffing placed patients. . . at an increased and high risk of injury or danger."

Montie S. Day, the patient's attorney, reports that Summit officials have refused to hand over staffing records from the day on which his client was injured. "Summit officials say that the staffing records are 'confidential' and can't be released. It seems clear that they're trying to hide something from their patients. If you were a patient, wouldn't you want to know what the staffing levels are on your unit? This isn't an unreasonable request," said Day.

Tenet Hospital Agrees to Safe Staffing - Sutter Stands Alone

Earlier this week, Tenet's Doctors Medical Center in Pinole agreed to establish a safe-staffing system like the one already in place at 25 Northern California hospitals, including Kaiser Permanente, Catholic Healthcare West and Alameda County. Sutter is the only major hospital corporation in the region that refuses to adopt the reasonable system (Scam Sheet #63).

Sutter's refusal says boatloads about its claim to be "Northern California's leading non-profit provider of health care services." Unfortunately, Sutter's ship of public relations is sinking, especially since for-profit companies like Tenet and Prison Health Services are more responsible regarding safe staffing standards than Sutter.

Sutter's Consolidation Craze

The *San Francisco Business Times* reports that Sutter's California Pacific Medical Center (CPMC), which made over \$120 million in profits during the past three years, wants to save money by downgrading one of its acute-care hospitals to a skilled nursing facility while renovating another facility.

CPMC is composed of three acute-care campuses that were formerly independent hospitals: Pacific Presbyterian Hospital, Children's Hospital and Davies Medical Center. According to the *Business Times*, CPMC officials will downgrade either the former Davies Medical Center or Children's Hospital, and consolidate acute-care services at the other facility. With the loss of an acute-care facility, "Surgeries, heart attacks, organ transplants and broken bones" would be forced to go elsewhere.

The plans have already provoked rapid reaction from elected officials. "No neighborhood wants to lose service and care, no mother wants their child to lose the access that they have become accustomed to," said Mark Leno, a member of San Francisco Board of Supervisors. "We can't accept either."

The plans follow on the heels of other Sutter consolidation efforts in Marin, Alameda and Sacramento Counties.

The newly revealed plans for CPMC have heightened San Franciscan's concerns about Sutter's plans to acquire St. Luke's Hospital. The independent hospital, located only two miles from CPMC's Davies Campus, serves a low-income community that generates far fewer hospital revenues than the well-heeled neighborhoods surrounding CPMC's other campuses. Sutter's purchase of St. Luke's was opposed by the San Francisco Health Commission and is now under review by California Attorney General Bill Lockyer.

The Sutter Scam Sheet is published by the Health Care Workers Union, Local 250 SEIU, to update elected officials, regulators, District and Community hospitals, industry insiders, consumers, labor unions and other healthcare purchasers about our campaign to Stop the Sutter Scam.

Local 250 is headquartered in Oakland. Call us at 510.251.1250, Visit our web site www.seiu250.org

