

EDITORIAL COMMENT

Study sets stage to rebuild trust in medical community

Published: Thursday, Jun 19, 2008

Now that a publicly funded, \$30,000 study has conclusively disproven allegations that St. Joseph Health System, which operates Petaluma Valley Hospital, was diverting money, patients and surgical procedures away from the local facility to its other hospital in Santa Rosa, Petaluma physicians should commit to working more constructively with the rest of the health-care community to strengthen the local hospital's operations and financial position. Dr. Bob Ostroff, the retired former chief of PVH's emergency department who heads the South Sonoma County Medical Group, triggered the costly study after publicly accusing St. Joseph of "plundering" the local hospital to strengthen the organization's other facility in Santa Rosa. Ostroff had expected the study would validate longstanding physician claims of hospital mismanagement. Instead, the report showed that St. Joseph was doing nothing wrong financially or operationally, and was certainly not transferring profits as had been alleged. Because Ostroff had vowed that his group would abide by the report's results and subsequently seek to develop a more constructive working relationship with the region's leading health care organization, it is now time for the physicians to come through on that promise. In April, physicians finally put aside plans to establish a for-profit outpatient surgery center in Petaluma that would have harmed the hospital by skimming off the most lucrative surgical procedures while leaving PVH with reduced revenues and the costly legal obligation to care for the indigent and uninsured. St. Joseph, meanwhile, continues to negotiate with several local surgeons on a proposed contract to operate the hospital's operating room. The agreement would enable doctors to have partial managerial control along with increased compensation.

Such a collaborative effort would ensure that local doctors and the organization managing the hospital move forward in unison, with each benefiting financially. Given the lack of leadership in Washington, D.C., on resolving the continued turmoil in the health-care industry, it's more important than ever for local members of the health-care community to work together to preserve and strengthen Petaluma's hospital. We hope that local physicians will join with the Petaluma Health Care District and St. Joseph's in collaboratively searching for new and creative ways to achieve that important community goal.