

December 06, 2022

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR HOLLY J. MITCHELL

Addressing the Inappropriate Transports of Psychiatric Patients to South Los Angeles

In August 2007, the Los Angeles County (County)-run King Drew Medical Center was closed after the County tried, for several years, to meet licensing, accreditation and quality standards for inpatient, emergency and trauma care in the South Los Angeles community. On December 2, 2008, the County approved a motion to restore inpatient services at the Martin Luther King Jr. (MLK) Medical Campus and to continue to serve South Los Angeles. On August 18, 2009, the County approved a plan to fund and build a privately-run 120 bed new hospital on the campus with an emergency department that could accommodate 30,000 annual visits, sized to match the census rate of the old King Drew Medical Center at the time of its closure. On February 9, 2010, the County established a new nonprofit board to run the new MLK Community Hospital (CH) and approved its lease and financial framework on April 22, 2014. On July 7, 2015, the new County-funded MLK CH opened to the public as a privately-run 131-bed hospital, with 21 emergency department beds, providing primary, specialty, and critical community-based care to the South Los Angeles community.

The hospital is successfully providing high-quality safety net services to the community. The hospital received national recognition by The Joint Commission, including its Gold Seal of Approval for Hospital Accreditation for continuous compliance with patient safety and quality care standards. MLK CH ranks among the top 10% of all hospitals in the country for patient satisfaction and has received accreditation from the National Committee on Quality Assurance for advanced inpatient diabetes care. Most recently, the hospital received a rare five-star rating from Center on Medicare and Medicaid Services in recognition of their excellence in patient care and safety. This rating was achieved by just 13% of the hospitals across the nation - and the only one in a high-need community, such as South Los Angeles.

These accomplishments are remarkable given MLK CH's emergency department has

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experienced severe and persistent patient overcrowding since before the COVID-19 pandemic. Since March of 2022, the MLK CH emergency room has seen an average of nearly 300-349 patients per day. At this pace, MLK CH will exceed 113,000 visits a year in an emergency room that the County originally sized to see just 30,000 visits a year. In October 2022, MLK CH reached 9,864 emergency room visits.

The Department of Health Services has been working on options to relieve MLK CH's persistent emergency room overcrowding and to draw appropriate patients to the MLK Outpatient Center's urgent care for non-emergent medical needs. Many patients in the MLK CH emergency waiting room, however, are psychiatric patients. California Welfare and Institutions Code Section 5150 (5150) allows psychiatric patients to be involuntarily held for treatment if they pose a danger to themselves or others. On average, per daily shift, the MLK CH emergency room holds six 5150 patients awaiting the availability of a psychiatric bed and another six patients who are awaiting 5150 evaluation.

MLK CH's service area encompasses 1.3M residents and includes cities such as Compton, Wilmington, sections of Westmont, Inglewood, Lynwood and Gardena. Many of the psychiatric patients in its emergency room, however, are transported there from outside its catchment area by law enforcement officers from Monrovia, Burbank, Sherman Oaks, Whittier, El Segundo, and Glendora, among other cities. It never refuses services to psychiatric patients transported to its emergency room, even if they are from outside its catchment area.

The transport of psychiatric patients from outside the service area, predominantly by law enforcement, to the MLK CH, however, is causing a huge strain on MLK CH's limited resources. MLK CH assigns six to twelve sitters who stay with unstable patients to ensure that they remain safe. In many cases, these patients stay 30 hours in MLK CH's already overcrowded emergency room, waiting for a psychiatric bed to open. Further, once stabilized, patients who do not meet 5150 standards can voluntarily decline linkages to services, like housing and transportation. Their release onto the campus and into the community leads to a further concentration of homelessness in an area already experiencing the highest rates of homelessness Countywide.

These problems will only worsen with the anticipated winter surge of patients who will visit the emergency room with flu and/or COVID-19, as well as with the fuller opening of the adjacent MLK Behavioral Health Center. Once fully operational, the MLK Behavioral Health Center is anticipated to bring an *additional* 578 outpatients and 228 residential clients a day to the MLK Medical campus.

I THEREFORE MOVE THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:

1. Direct the Director of the Department of Health Services, through the Emergency Medical Services Agency, to in 30 days:
 - a. Assign a staffed emergency transport vehicle to the Martin Luther King, Jr. (MLK) Medical Campus so patients on the campus can be timely transported without the need to call the already over-burdened regional “9-1-1” system; and
 - b. Provide a written report to the Board on how the transport of psychiatric patients in Los Angeles County (County) by emergency medical services should function and the extent to which County-run hospitals are also receiving inappropriate transports of psychiatric patients from outside their catchment areas.
2. Direct the Director of the Department of Health Services, through the Emergency Medical Services Agency, in collaboration with the Director of the Department of Mental Health, County Counsel, the Interim Chief of the Fire Department, the Sheriff, and leadership from the MLK Community Hospital (CH) and the MLK Medical Campus Exodus Psychiatric Urgent Care Clinic, to report back in writing in 30 days on the development of equitable operational and legislative options that limit the transport of psychiatric patients from outside the MLK CH catchment area to the MLK Medical Campus and its emergency room and to instead ensure they are transported to appropriate mental health treatment facilities in their areas of residence.

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