

LOS ANGELES

BUSINESS JOURNAL.

September 6 - 12, 2004

\$3.00

Poor Prognosis

The key issue not identified in the article "Health Official Feels Pressure to Speed King/Drew Cleanup" (Aug. 23) is one of lack of leadership.

Problems continue because of a massive failure of leadership at Department of Health Services, and in particular by its director, Thomas Garthwaite. During the Aug. 10 supervisor's meeting, Garthwaite made it quite clear that he was at King/Drew two to three times a week and that his second in command is there almost seven days a week. What wasn't mentioned was the so-called "crack" DHS management team that had been assembled to provide the day-to-day management of King/Drew.

So when you consider the high-paid consultants at King/Drew and the time spent by Garthwaite and his DHS team, the only conclusion a health care expert can arrive at is that the continuing problems have less to do with an entrenched problem and more to do with failed leadership.

Some of the most egregious errors have occurred while King/Drew was under the direct day-to-day management of either DHS or its consultants. The recent scandal regarding the failure of nurses to perform OR instrument and sponge counts occurred even after the county paid the so-called nursing management consultants more than \$500,000, of which \$96,000 was to verify nursing competencies.

The problems at King/Drew are not isolated. We have already begun to see problems at County/USC with the recent walkout of nurses from the burn unit during the July 4th weekend, prompting the county to get an injunction to prohibit future walkouts. King/Drew is the proverbial canary in the coal mine for DHS. The question is whether the Board of Supervisors will respond in time and finally form a Health Authority or whether it will permit DHS to collapse from its own incompetence.

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