

Civil Grand Jury Probe Adds to Scrutiny of Troubled King/Drew

A DD one more ingredient to the alphabet soup of agencies that have been investigating troubled Martin Luther King Jr./Drew Medical Center: the Los Angeles County Civil Grand Jury.

A body of 23 citizens with the authority to investigate city and county agencies, the grand jury opened a probe last month of the hospital and the county health department, following a complaint from health care activist Genevieve Clavreul.

A registered nurse who has long questioned the quality of management at the hospital and department, Clavreul said she filed a written complaint Aug. 2 and was called in by the grand jury's health care committee on Aug. 26 and questioned for several hours.

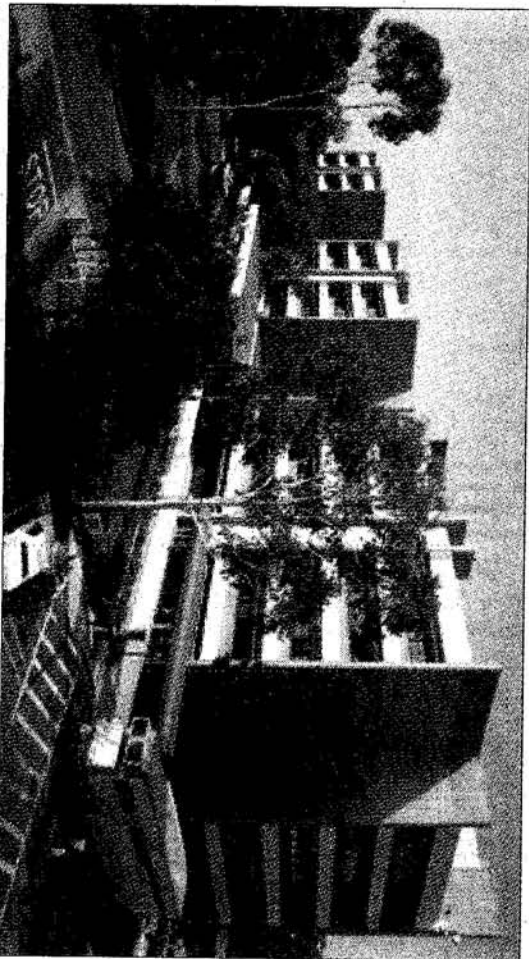


HEALTH CARE

LAURENCE
DARMIENTO

"I was so surprised. Initially I thought I would never hear from them," said Clavreul, a healthcare management consultant.

Clavreul said she then saw those same members questioning individuals at a Sept. 3 meeting of the Legislature's Select Committee on the Status of Health Care Facilities in California. The committee held the meeting at the hospital



Complaint: Activist draws attention to lingering oversight problems at facility.

to get an update on efforts to improve care there.

Clavreul's complaint letter focused on what

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she claims are broad management failures at the Department of Health Services, starting with Director Dr. Thomas Garthwaite. She claims the ongoing disclosures of poor care at the hospital are only a "sentinel" of this larger problem, and she is pushing for the establishment of a health authority to better manage the department.

Among the problems at the Willowbrook hospital, which has been sanctioned by state and federal regulators, are patient deaths from poor care, conflicts of financial interest and staffing shortages that have closed wards.

The grand jury does not have the power to order changes in how the department is managed but every year it publishes a report recommending county supervisors take actions on a variety of problems.

Gordon Trask, the grand jury's counsel, said he was prohibited on commenting on the body's work pending release of its annual report.

Bad News, Good News

It's hard to imagine a hospital closure as