

The Jacob Journal

A Newsletter from Supervisor Dianne Jacob

November 2001

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Emergency Medicine Takes Top Priority

Families, businesses and federal lawmakers aren't the only ones re-evaluating their priorities after the events of September 11. To the San Diego County Board of Supervisors, the terrorist attacks have triggered a cruel, but necessary priority check. Along with the nation, the Board is humbly reminded, that firefighters, law enforcement officers and emergency service workers are not just valiant but indispensable.

The magnitude of the attack on New York City has forced a question that's not comfortable but necessary to ease the minds of San Diegans. Are we prepared? The San Diego County Medical Society and the County's own Health Services Advisory Board have answered with sobering statistics regarding our region's emergency system. The eerie title of a report from the Medical Society's emergency oversight committee sums it up. The status of regional emergency care is, "Overwhelmed, Underfunded and Dangerous."

The professional men and women who respond to the County's most severe medical emergencies tell of an unreliable emergency computer network foundering with an outdated operating system and 22 jam-packed

emergency rooms with patients waiting as long as 10 hours for services. On any given day in any emergency room, ambulances are turned away as much as 38 percent of the time. When emergency rooms in the other parts of the state have nearly twice the number of beds as emergency rooms in San Diego County, we must recognize the immediate need to fix the problem.

"Any comprehensive solution to the emergency care crisis must seek to reverse the trend in unwarranted emergency room use."

The County Board of Supervisors wants to rectify this bleak prognosis. Thanks to an initial \$15 million made available to the County through the landmark tobacco settlement, the County has the opportunity to tackle this mounting health crisis.

In 1999, San Diego County was the first jurisdiction in the state to devote all tobacco settlement funds to health-related initiatives. Today, the region's top medical experts agree, it is imperative to invest this money in projects with the greatest potential to reduce overcrowding in our emergency rooms. At this moment in history, there is no more responsible use for public money than to strengthen our region's emergency services.

We know that technology can make the difference when seconds count. Immediately, the County will spend \$3 million to upgrade its emergency computer network, also called the Quality-Assurance Network, including an overhaul of the network's antiquated operating system. The system will be far less likely to crash unexpectedly and will more easily

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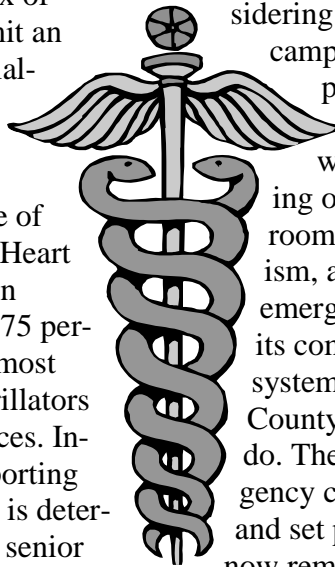
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route patients with particular injuries to specialists at individual hospitals. The system will be augmented to track and catalog cases of suspicious ailments giving public health specialists early warning to the unlikely event of a biological or chemical attack.

Long before bioterrorism became a household name, the County began training its emergency personnel to contend with this most complex of crimes. This year, the County will commit an additional \$1.5 million to purchase specialized technology and train personnel to respond to emergencies involving agents of bioterror.

Technology also can help address one of the most frequent medical emergencies. Heart attack sufferers who receive defibrillation within three minutes of an attack have a 75 percent survival rate. Compare that to an almost certain death after 10 minutes and defibrillators become infinitely valuable medical devices. Instead of wasting precious seconds transporting patients to medical facilities, the County is determined to place the life-saving devices at senior centers, golf courses, shopping malls, airports and other public locations. The County has committed an initial \$250,000 to the project.

San Diegans are fortunate to have six trauma centers offering highly specialized care to the region's critically injured patients, but adequate funding has long been a challenge for trauma centers as each must scramble for reimbursement from private and government sources. In recent years, centers in San Diego have found their operations further compromised by an increasing number of residents who visit emergency rooms for primary medical care. The Board is well aware of this unfortunate industry-wide situation and has designated \$1 million to assist our



region's trauma and emergency care services. Any comprehensive solution to the emergency care crisis which calls for the enhancement of medical resources must seek to reverse the trend in unwarranted emergency room use. It is estimated that only 20 percent of the more than 2,500 San Diegans who dial 911 or are treated in an emergency room each day are truly in need of emergency care. That's why the County is considering spending \$250,000 on a sweeping campaign to educate the public about the appropriate use of emergency departments.

By upgrading our emergency network, investing in defibrillators, supporting our trauma centers and emergency rooms, staying pro-active against bioterrorism, and working to educate residents about emergency care, the County is demonstrating its commitment to our region's emergency system. Perhaps more importantly, the County recognizes that there is much more to do. The County has asked the region's emergency care providers to determine their needs and set priorities so that the \$6.5 million which now remains of the \$15 million tobacco settlement money can go toward programs recommended by those on the front lines of medical care.

\$15 million is one small contribution toward our ideal level of care, but this initial investment is both helpful and symbolic. It's a way for the County to reinforce its renewed commitment to emergency services. The September 11 attacks were an irrevocable reminder of the importance of quality emergency care in America and the County of San Diego is more convinced than ever of its fundamental mandate to keep its citizens healthy and safe.

Nearby hospitals stressed by Scripps East closure

When Scripps East Hospital closed its doors in the Spring of 2000, it fell on the nearby hospitals to pick up the slack. Visits to Grossmont have jumped from 47,000 a year to 70,000 in 2000. The "saturation" rate at the region's three remaining ERs has skyrocketed to a frightening 473 percent. "Saturation" means an ER is full and cannot accept patients. In fact, 2,056 times this year, paramedics have been unable to transport patients to Kaiser because its ER has been full. That's up from 274 times during 1999. Reasons enough to invest in emergency care!

A New Respect for 'Old Glory'

The room was packed at the latest meeting of the Grossmont Union High School District Board of Trustees and 17-year old Brian Wheeler spoke passionately about his desire to reinstate the Pledge of Allegiance within the Grossmont Union High School District.

Long before the terrorist attacks of September 11, the senior from Santana High School in Santee had asked the trustees to make the Pledge a part of the district's morning routine. While the district does make time for patriotic observances, it does not designate a specific time each day for the recitation of the Pledge.

Brian was far from alone as he addressed the trustees that night. Like Brian, Supervisor Jacob is a proud American and strongly believes in support of Country. When she heard about Brian's quest to bring the Pledge of Allegiance back to East County classrooms, Supervisor Jacob rallied her colleagues on the Board, who quickly adopted a resolution supporting Brian. In testimony before the trustees, Supervisor Jacob presented the County's resolution and made her case for the Pledge.

Color Guards: Supervisor Jacob with Santana High School Senior Brian Wheeler. The Grossmont Union High School District recently approved Brian's request to bring the Pledge of Allegiance back to the classroom.

"Like me, I'm sure many of you grew up saying the Pledge at the beginning of your elementary, junior high and high school days," the Supervisor told the trustees. "Looking back, I am thankful for this simple and peaceful way of expressing gratitude to my Country. But, the Pledge is much more than tradition."

"America believes that each and every one of her citizens is entitled to a quality education. Reciting the Pledge of Allegiance is a small act of appreciation for that gift of learning," the Supervisor said. "The daily Pledge presents the opportunity for students to show respect for the freedoms America offers each of us."

"In this current climate, saying the pledge is a constructive way for young people to channel any strong emotions they might be feeling. It's a way for all of us, without regard to our age, creed, ethnicity, gender or political affiliation, to show support for America," the Supervisor said.

"I'm convinced that giving students the opportunity to reflect upon the words of the Pledge each morning will do wonders for our future," she added.

The final vote from the trustees was unanimous. Each morning, at all the schools within the Grossmont District, students will say the Pledge of Allegiance. Cheers to Brian Wheeler!

Join me for Coffee and Conversation...

December 14, 2001 8:30 a.m.

The Jelly Roll Caffe

3509 Sweetwater Springs Boulevard

Spring Valley

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Nov-01

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