

OPINION

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Drastic measures needed for hospital

BY GENEVIÈVE M. CLAVREUL

WHEN one wants to spark real change in a situation such as in someone abusing alcohol or drugs, we look for what is termed a "significant emotional event" or "hitting rock bottom." When just such an event occurs, people often make drastic changes in their lives.

So too with the county's Martin Luther King Jr.-Harbor Hospital and its much advertised failings. Except until recently, no one has been able to evoke a significant emotional event. That is, until the case of Edith Isabel Rodriguez, who lay writhing on the emergency room floor for 45 minutes while up to seven King-Harbor employees — one of which was a triage nurse — did nothing to help. Workers seemingly watched from their desks as the events unfolded. The staff appeared so inured to such events that a janitor busily mopped around the writhing woman but he too offered no assistance.

These events, memorialized on videotape and reported first by the Los Angeles Times and then replayed through various media outlets, seem to have finally initiated a much needed "kick-in the pants."

The question is: Is it too late to accomplish any good and will those in the position to do something use this event to evoke positive and permanent change?

The state has obviously taken the first step by beginning the process to revoke King-Harbor's license — and rightly so. No one can ignore the seriousness of what happened to the 45-year-old Rodriguez and most importantly to the fact those

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charged with providing aid failed to do so. As it turned out, Rodriguez died outside the emergency room of her ailment, a perforated bowel.

As a registered nurse, I was appalled to learn that the triage nurse and several other health care workers apparently chose to ignore her pleas for help. They found it acceptable the patient should be arrested. I also believe that the nurse's lack of compassion is an indicator of just how demoralized and demotivated the King-Harbor staff must be for such an event to have happened.

When a staff reaches such a level of demoralization there is almost no remedy except to enact drastic measures — much like what Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger did by giving the go ahead to the State Department of Health Services to begin the process of license revocation.

I know that many in the South LA community are concerned with the consequences of closing this hospital. But to simply allow business as usual is unacceptable; the community it serves deserves better and should expect better.

As an outspoken supporter of keeping King-Drew Medical Center/King-Harbor open and operating, I can also recognize when it is time to take drastic measures.

Up to this point there has been much to do about the reforms being made, references to how such action has never happened before and that there is no road

map; all defeatist language. The County Supervisors also chose to ignore all the inconsistent information that they received from first Dr. Garthwaite, and now his successor, Dr. Bruce Chernoff, director of County Department of Health Services, and his team.

If the board hopes to maintain the impetus of the significant emotional event then they must make an effort to augment the event. The best way to achieve this would be to terminate those in charge who continue to fail at providing accurate information and who continually fail to accomplish the goal set by the supervisors — to save King-Harbor.

Though Chernoff and company tout the number of staff reprimanded, removed, retrained and rehired, this has an almost negligible effect on changing the ingrained culture at the embattled hospital. The subordinates have limited power to affect the culture and now with morale in the dumps, they need to be able to look to someone who can inspire and lead. Someone I firmly believe are not in the skill sets of either Chernoff or Epps.

There is no doubt in my mind that we must do everything to save King-Harbor. We have the opportunity to revamp and reopen King-Harbor under our terms. My recommendation would be to have a planned closure, then during that time invest in rehiring staff, select real leaders that can motivate and inspire and reopen under a public/private structure.

As much as it pains me, it may be time to call this code.

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