

S.I. Hospital brass blasts city, state, feds on shutdown

Staten Island Hospital officials lashed out at federal, state and city governments yesterday for what they called a lack of leadership and initiative in the fight to keep the U.S. Public Health Service Hospital in Clifton open.

A statement released by Rae F. Nichols, president of the Board of Trustees, that a serious health care crisis will occur on Staten Island unless drastic action is taken to keep the PHS Hospital open and functioning.

In his criticism of government officials and police Nichols stated:

"The administration in Washington has taken this community down a garden path relative to the Public Health Service Hospital's continued operations. Last spring in meetings held in Washington in the offices of Congressman Guy V. Molinari, representatives of the Department of Health and Human Services voiced strong optimism that adequate federal funding would be available for the capital and reconstruction costs necessary to bring the Public Health Service Hospital into compliance with state health codes.

"In addition, the same officials indicated that the administration would make a strong bid for operating funds to help defray whatever deficits might be incurred in the operation of the Public Health Service Hospital by the community during the initial years.

"It would now appear that the earlier forecasts for an infusion of government funding for both reconstruction and operating purposes at the Public Health Service Hospital will not materialize. The state of New York and the City have sat back through these months of discussion and have provided neither substantial help for the Public Health Service Hospital's continuation, nor any alternative solutions toward solving the potential health crisis in this community.

"Staten Island continues to be the only growing borough in the City of New York. It is also the only borough which does not have a city-operated hospital. In recent months, we have seen occupancy rates at all the hospitals on Staten Island at an all-time high.

"Emergency Room and outpatient visits continue to increase immeasurably as our population increases. The closing of the Public Health Service Hospital will create a health void in this community that will be impossible to fill by the existing voluntary medical institutions.

"The Staten Island Hospital alone gives approximately \$2 million worth of free and unreimbursed medical care to Island residents. The financial impact of the Public Health Service Hospital's closing would put every other hospital in the community in jeopardy if those outpatients and inpatients presently served at the Clifton facility had to be taken care of by the present medical delivery system. Very simply, if the Public Health Service Hospital closes, there will be a lack of medical care for many people in this community.

"The federal government took on a responsibility to operate a public health service hospital many many years ago. If the administration in Washington wishes to negotiate that commitment, at the very least, it has the responsibility of insuring that the community can take over the Public Health Service Hospital and operate it in a sound and viable way to help provide the necessary health services to the people in this community. The state and city governments have equal responsibility for the health care of the people of Staten Island."