

**CAMDEN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
PUBLIC HEARING REGARDING HEALTHCARE SERVICES
MONDAY, MARCH 22, 2004 6:00 PM
WOODBINE, GEORGIA**

The Camden County Board of Commissioners held a public hearing regarding healthcare services on Monday, March 22, 2004, at 6:00 p.m. in the Courtroom, Superior Court, Camden County Courthouse, Woodbine, Georgia.

Present: Chairman David L. Rainer; Vice-Chairman E.B. Herrin, Jr.; Commissioner Preston Rhodes; Commissioner Stephen L. Berry; Commissioner Sanford S. Feller; County Manager Charles D. Akridge; and County Attorney Brent Green.

Chairman Rainer called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Dr. Michael Howington stated Camden County's medical community is far smaller than it should be with only thirty percent of the medical staff practicing solely at Camden Medical Center. The medical staff has asked the hospital for an outside expert to perform a community medical needs analysis. Dr. Howington said the staff's efforts to improve the hospital are usually met with resistance from the Glynn-Brunswick Hospital Authority because they are not in the context of the Authority's "system approach". Dr. Howington advised the Commissioners that the hospital administration has experienced a high turn over, and has not been successful in physician retention and recruitment. Also, he said the Authority is not willing to apply for a Certificate of Need (CON), but rather pursue the option of a "major hospital addition".

Dr. Howington told the Commissioners that the hospital does not currently have the medical staff's support, and staff believes it does not possess the organizational characteristics to make it an acceptable steward of the hospital's mission.

Dr. Howington said the Glynn-Brunswick Memorial Hospital Authority's resolution clearly confines its operation area to the City of Brunswick and Glynn County.

He stated that Camden Medical Center only has an advisory board, which has limited powers and primarily exists to advise the Authority or management. Although the advisory board does have the sole responsibility of credentialing and disciplining the medical and allied health staff, it lacks fiduciary powers rendering it less influential in advancing community accountability.

Dr. Howington believes Southeast Georgia Health Systems has failed in consolidating clinical services between Camden and Brunswick. Therefore, Brunswick has not traditionally accepted the responsibility of taking care of Camden County's unmet needs.

In closing Dr. Howington requested the help and leadership of the Commissioners.

Commissioner Feller asked Dr. Howington if the Administration has opted to build an addition to the hospital rather than a new hospital. Dr. Howington advised Commissioner Feller that was correct, and he did not believe the Administration was trying to build a hospital suitable in size for Camden County. Commissioner Feller stated it was his understanding that the Authority in Atlanta indicated a new facility would be built with a reduced number of rooms. Dr. Howington advised that the Authority has spoken with Atlanta, but have not filed a CON for a new hospital. Commissioner Feller questioned the prudence of building an addition to the hospital rather than a new hospital, and Dr. Howington advised Commissioner Feller the existing hospital has serious infrastructure problems and splitting clinical services across two (2) buildings is a less desirable solution than a single free standing building.

Commissioner Rhodes asked if the lines of communication have improved since the last meeting, and Dr. Howington said the Administration, Advisory Board and Authority chose not to seek out the issues raised with the medical staff. Commissioner Rhodes questioned the level of service being provided, and Dr. Howington stated he believes

healthier patients are being seen, and the sicker patients are being transferred out due to the diminished capabilities. Commissioner Rhodes asked about the legal implications regarding the Authority being in Camden County. Dr. Howington advised the Authority's creating resolution of 1962 defined the Authority's area of operation to the City of Brunswick and Glynn County, and only the local legislation could allow the Authority entering into another county. He advised the City and the County have never agreed to take care of Camden County's healthcare needs, and he believes the Authority uses Camden Medical to support the services in Glynn County.

Vice-Chairman Herrin voiced his concerns to Dr. Howington regarding the lengthy amount of time emergency room patients must wait before being seen by a doctor.

In discussion among Chairman Rainer, Commissioner Berry and Dr. Howington, it was determined that documentation supporting the Authority entering into Camden County could not be found in the records of the County, the City of St. Marys or the local hospital board existing at that time.

Dr. Vantuil Vargas agreed with Dr. Howington, and wanted to add that the State could not issue a Certificate of Need due to low patient occupancy. Dr. Vargas stated that the low occupancy was due to not enough doctors in Camden County to offer medical services. Therefore patients seek care in Jacksonville. Dr. Vargas said without having doctors to care for patients, hospital beds can not be filled and a CON would not be granted.

Dr. Max Jones addressed the Commissioners regarding the Authority's failure to address the three promises made to the Commissioners at the last meeting. Dr. Jones reminded the Commissioners that the Authority promised to commit to increased physician recruitment, to seek modification with the General Assembly to allow Camden County to have representation on the Authority, and to provide a submitted certificate of need application for a new hospital within six (6) months of the last meeting. Dr. Jones advised the Commissioners that only one (1) new physician has joined the staff and that six (6) physicians have been lost, the creating Resolution has not been amended allowing for representation of Camden County, and they have not provided a submitted Certificate of Need application. Dr. Jones advised his research did not produce any evidence indicating the Glynn-Brunswick Memorial Hospital Authority was invited into Camden County, and it is his opinion the Authority is operating in Camden County under violation of the law.

Dr. Elizabeth Atkinson addressed the Commissioners regarding her decision to leave Camden County. Dr. Atkinson stated her reasons for leaving this area included the ineffectiveness of the hospital ownership and the instability of the hospital environment which effects the recruiting and retention of physicians.

Dr. Noel Chua spoke regarding the issues of patients being turned away for testing, the weak relationship between the administration and staff, and the need to improve the hospital layout.

Dr. Gilberto Martorell stated the hospital should be locally managed.

Dr. Richard Brandon said he stopped delivering babies three (3) years ago due to the reimbursement rates of TRICARE, which is significant because most of our community is military. TRICARE reimburses providers at 45% and the hospital at 88%, but the hospital refuses to join in an effort with providers that would allow participation in the facilities side of the equation. The hospital does not allow them to participate in recruiting and does not help with the increasing costs of malpractice premiums. In the past few years, approximately 32 physicians have left Camden County. Dr. Brandon believes if the hospital is given autonomy and allowed to reinvest in healthcare needs for this community, healthcare services and staff would increase in a very short amount of time.

Commissioner Rhodes inquired how much time it would take for this type of turn around, and Dr. Brandon stated approximately three (3) years.

Mr. Howard Sepp, Camden Campus Administrator, advised the Commissioners that progress has been made. He is actively working on the following issues: physician recruitment noting that two (2) physicians have been recruited; development of new products and services to meet the growing needs of the community, which includes MRI services and a sleep disorders clinic; and planning for facility expansion, which he produced a drawn plan.

There was discussion on the costs of the renovations. Mr. Sepp said he did not have an exact figure but 80,000 square feet would cost approximately sixteen (16) million dollars that would be paid for with cash or bond issues.

Mr. Sepp advised the Commissioners the new building would meet code standards for this area and the existing structure's windows would be replaced and the roof ballast would be replaced with rubber.

Commissioner Berry asked the members of the Hospital Authority if the Authority was committed to that type of investment in Camden County. Dr. Marsha Certain advised the Authority was committed to the investment.

Upon questioning from Commissioner Rhodes regarding the administration communications with the staff on these matters, Mr. Sepp advised communications were being conducted department by department so the needs of each department could be determined.

Commissioner Berry asked the Authority members present (Dr. Marsha Certain, Tim Chandler, and Joe Glisson) how the Authority responded to the comments made regarding the Authority not obtaining permission to enter Camden County. Dr. Certain responded that she found it a little appalling, but it was her understanding that the hospital was in dire straights and someone had to step in. Dr. Certain stated that the Brunswick hospital experiences the same problems as Camden regarding referring patients out to other facilities.

Commissioner Berry asked if the Authority had considered sending out a request for bid to see if there was any interest in someone buying the Camden hospital. Dr. Certain stated that it would not be satisfactory to have an owner that was not located in this area and that more control would be wanted.

Gary Coleburg, President/CEO of Southeast Georgia Regional Medical Center, stated they have been approached by for-profit companies about selling Camden, but the Authority is not interested in selling the hospital.

Mr. Coleburg blamed the payor mix as being the problem in recruiting and retaining physicians in this community. Several doctors strongly disagreed with Mr. Coleburg's statement.

Commissioner Berry questioned Mr. Coleburg on why he had not asked the legislature to add Camden County to the hospital Authority as he previously promised, and how does he respond to the Authority not being invited into Camden County. Mr. Coleburg said the hospital's lawyers would have to address these questions.

Dean Gooden, Reverend Ronald Denton, and Loretta Henderson all commented on the excessively lengthy emergency room visits they recently experienced at the hospital.

Chairman Rainer concluded the Public Hearing at 8:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

David L. Rainer
Chairman

Jodi M. Galloway
Executive Assistant