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Editorials

Patient Power

For years the American medical profession operated on the philosophy that it knew what was best for the patient. But that attitude has been changing, and last week the survey team that will determine whether the Nassau County Medical Center retains its accreditation met with those who receive medical care as well as those who give it. The investigators got an earful of complaints as they began their three-day inspection, but they're not actually required to take any of them into account in their report; and in fact they won't be allowed to comment on the quality of medical care at the hospital—which of course is what the patients are most concerned about. Aside from a chance to air their grievances, about all the consumer advocates got out of Monday's meeting was an assurance from the hospital superintendent that he would discuss the accreditation report with them when it's filed in three months or so.

That's hardly a ringing affirmation of the public's right to a role in operating a medical center their taxes pay for. It's been suggested that the center's five-man board of managers should be expanded to include people who actually use the hospital. We don't know why County Executive Cuso hasn't bought that idea. Isn't it only fair to give the patients a voice in deciding what's best for them?