

Med Center Opens Its Meetings

Caso, consumer advocates applaud decision by board to let in the public

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By Bruce Lambert Jr.

East Meadow—The Nassau County Medical Center's board of managers has voted to open its meetings to the public, providing a forum for confronting controversies involving the hospital's administration and operation.

The board's unanimous action followed repeated requests from local groups during the past year and behind-the-scenes urging from County Executive Caso in recent weeks. Caso and consumer advocates hailed the board's move.

With eight members present (the ninth seat is vacant), the board approved the policy Monday and announced it yesterday. The open-meeting policy will begin at the September meeting. The exact format for the public's participation, as well as the time and place of the first open meeting, will be decided in the board's remaining summer sessions.

Hospital board president Warren J. Freeman said, "The question of whether or not to hold open meetings has been under consideration . . . for several months. With the amount of interest expressed at the community meeting two weeks ago, the board, wishing to be responsive to the needs and desires of the public, speeded this consideration."

The resolution was introduced by board member Robert Hill, a psychiatric social worker from Old Westbury. "I'm sure there were qualms for all of us" in adopting the policy, he said. Board members were worried that public participation would extend the board's already lengthy weekly meetings, Hill said. Monday's meeting, for example, ran from 8 AM through the early afternoon. "Many of us have regular jobs and families to attend to," Hill said.

As with most boards, Hill said, some

meetings will have to be closed executive sessions. An example would be meetings on the board's current search for a new superintendent to succeed Dr. James Collins, who resigned under fire this spring.

Caso, who said he was "delighted" with the announcement, had privately urged several board members to approve the change. In January, Caso expanded the board and appointed its first female and minority members.

"I think it's great," said Joan Saltzman, executive director of Community Advocates, a consumer group specializing in health services. "It indicates a fine positive attitude and shows the county wants to have a fine hospital." Open meetings are "very unusual" for a hospital board, she said. Hill said Nassau will be the first hospital anywhere with open board meetings, though Ms. Saltzman said she believes there are a few others.

Another supporter of open meetings is Lorenzo Merritt, director of Community Organization Services of Westbury, which serves the poor and minorities. "I would say congratulations to the board for taking this forward step," Merritt said. "It will help them run a much better hospital."

A number of hospital controversies have arisen in the past year. Open heart surgery was suspended after it was revealed that the program had not received state approval and had experienced a high mortality rate. A consultant's report said the new 19-story Dynamic Care Building is too big and elaborate for the county's needs. Some doctors, paid as full-time staff employees, are allowed to moonlight in private practice during working time. And the state suspended \$400,000 in aid to the psychiatric department because of "deplorable" conditions.

Island, Plattsburg and Sagatoga also had been excellent over the long weekend.

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Hospital Board Plans Open Meetings

The Board of Managers of the Nassau County Medical Center in East Meadow, L. I., announced that it would hold meetings open to the public, with the first such meeting to be in September. Warren J. Freeman, the board president, said the decision to hold the open meetings had come as a result of lengthy discussions following the medical center's community meeting of June 27, during which many people expressed interest in such sessions.