

NEWS

From the County of San Bernardino
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 13, 2007

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Board approves plan to provide health care in Needles

The San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors on Tuesday took steps to ensure the people of Needles will again have access to vital health care services within their city limits.

The Board authorized administrators at the County's hospital, Arrowhead Regional Medical Center, to manage and operate the Colorado River Medical Center (CRMC) in Needles as a Critical Access facility and restore many medical services that were moved by the current private-industry provider to a new hospital across the state line in Arizona.

The Board action was spearheaded by First District Supervisor Brad Mitzelfelt, whose First District includes Needles along with the vast majority of the High Desert.

"There are some residents who live in Needles whose medical coverage plans would not cover services provided in another state – they have to receive services here in California," Supervisor Mitzelfelt said. "There are other residents who lack transportation to be able to travel to locations where they could receive adequate medical care, including many who are poor, elderly or disabled."

"Our mission as the Board of Supervisors of San Bernardino County is to provide services that promote the health, safety, well being, and quality of life of our residents," Supervisor Mitzelfelt added. "Ensuring these needs are met is our most important responsibility."

CRMC is a 53-bed hospital currently operated by Lifepoint Hospitals Inc. that serves approximately 70,000 people in the tri-state area of Arizona, California and Nevada. Needles has approximately 5,000 residents.

-MOVE-

Needles Hospital

March 13, 2007

Page 2

Services that may be provided at CRMC by ARMC include 24-hour emergency care, limited acute care (96-hour average length of stay), pharmacy, radiology, laboratory, rehabilitation services, diagnostics and outpatient primary care.

"The people of Needles should feel confident that they can access the types of health care services they need," said ARMC Chief Executive Officer June Griffith-Collison. "The Board's approval of this plan allows us to step up our efforts in ensuring that they will again have that confidence."

"We will have significant challenges, such as building staff and the logistics of operating a facility that is about 200 miles away from ARMC, but we can meet these challenges," said Griffith-Collison.

In approving the plan Tuesday, the Board also recommended that:

- The County continue to pursue necessary actions to assume management of CRMC
- ARMC engage its auditors, Vavrinek, Trine, Day and Company, to conduct a due diligence review of CRMC
- The Director of Real Estate Services pursue a lease agreement between the County and the City of Needles for CRMC, in the amount of \$360,000 annually, upon termination of the lease agreement between the Board of Trustees of Needles

In October 2006, the Board of Supervisors authorized ARMC and the County Administrative Office to review options regarding the possible transfer of management for CRMC to the County under the direction of ARMC. At the request of the First District Supervisor, members of ARMC's administrative team then visited CRMC and Needles to survey the hospital and determine the feasibility of taking over management of the facility.

But because of ongoing negotiations between Lifepoint and the City of Needles, active negotiations for assumption of management of CRMC by the County were halted. On Feb. 14, 2007, at the request of the Needles City Council and the residents of CRMC's service area, Supervisor Mitzelfelt, County Administrative Officer Mark Uffer, and Griffith-Collison traveled to Needles to attend the Needles City Council meeting.

After listening to the concerns of residents and City Council members during this meeting, it became apparent that a settlement agreement between Lifepoint and the City of Needles regarding management of CRMC would not be forthcoming. At the direction of the First District Supervisor's office, negotiations on behalf of the County to assume management of CRMC then resumed.