

It seems that our new hospital/medical center is too often under attack for one reason or another. I speak here only as a concerned islander who has listened to the community conversations, read a lot about PeaceHealth and other Catholic health care delivery systems, and served as a volunteer in the new facility. I urge everyone to consider the following:

The old Inter-island Medical Center was losing money at an incredibly fast rate, and was on the verge of bankruptcy. The main reason for this was that many of our islanders are on Medicare, and the Medicare reimbursements that the clinic received for treating this segment of our population were way below the actual costs of treatment because we were classified as a rural health clinic.

When we upgraded our classification to a small hospital, our reimbursement rates from Medicare went up dramatically – enabling our income to more closely match our costs.

Even though we had emergency services available in the past, our doctors were “on call” at off-hours, had to drive from their homes to the IIMC when an in-person consultation was called for, and airlifting islanders to the mainland for treatment was often required.

We now have a physician on-site in a 24/7 emergency department, and far fewer people have to incur the expense and inconvenience of an airlift.

PeaceHealth is NOT owned and operated by the Catholic Church. It is a private non-profit corporation that respects its Catholic heritage. The board of PeaceHealth honors the privacy of the doctor-patient relationship, giving members of its medical staff the right to do what they believe is in the patient’s best interest, including pregnancy prevention by use of contraception and following any and all personal health directives that the patient and/or family members have made.

If a patient needs/wants services that aren’t offered in the hospital itself (such as physician-assisted suicide or elective abortion), PeaceHealth physicians must respect the hospital’s policies that exclude such services, but they can – and do – make referrals to organizations that offer these services.

Many of us on the island can recount a personal experience or the experience of a friend at the new facility that has been problematic in some way – a wait that is too long, the absence of a Saturday clinic, phone calls that get dropped or aren't returned, having to provide information that was already in the IIMC files, having to make an appointment for a service that used to be walk-in, being charged much more for services than used to be the case, etc., etc.

Issues such as these are part of the “growing pains” that accompany any major change in an organization. As time passes and as the staff of the hospital gets accustomed to their new building and its various systems, many of these issues will get resolved and/or additional staff will be hired to meet the new needs that are being identified.

Our new facility has state-of-the-art diagnostic and treatment capabilities, and provides an environment that is beautiful, restful, and healing in its nature. Absolutely no tax dollars were used to pay for it. Private donations from islanders plus PeaceHealth's own generous financial support covered all costs.

And, my understanding is that future tax dollars are specifically ear-marked for 24/7 and charity care, not for other hospital services. Our Hospital District Commissioners continue to monitor how PeaceHealth spends our tax dollars.

For most of us change is difficult, and we all need time to adjust. I believe it is very important to acknowledge that in order for quality health care on our island just to survive – let alone expand to meet islanders' current and future needs -- our Hospital District carefully weighed its options and made the very best choice it could.

Lori Stokes
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Editor's Note: *PeaceHealth, which owns PeaceHealth Peace Island Medical Center, is part of the [ministries](#) of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace. The Sisters report directly to the Vatican every two years. All staff in their facilities are supposed to abide by the [Bishops Ethical and Religious Directives](#) which up to now have been somewhat loosely interpreted.*