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THE REPORTER DISPATCH

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 1991

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O'Rourke invites hospital board to quit

By Barbara J. Durkin
Staff Writer

The Westchester County Medical Center's hospital board wanted the new hospitals commissioner removed from his post. But now the board's members are the ones being asked to leave.

The hospital board on Tuesday sent county legislators a two-page letter criticizing the qualifications of Mack L. Carter Jr., hoping to persuade the legislators not to confirm him for the job he begins Monday.

County Executive Andrew

O'Rourke, who made the appointment, responded yesterday by sending out a two-paragraph missive to 13 board members, saying he would welcome their resignations. A form resignation letter and postpaid return envelope were included in the letter to be delivered via overnight mail.



Mack L. Carter Jr.

"I don't think he's going to get

many resignations," board Chairwoman Carol Farkas said. "I think our responsibility here is to serve the community and the taxpayers and to do what is best for the medical center. We're not here to be yes men."

Board members, who volunteer their time for three-year terms, advise the county on hospital issues, including budgets, long-term planning and daily operations.

The 15-member board has two vacancies. Twelve board members signed the letter to legislators, along with one former member whose term has expired. One mem-

ber who missed the signing was thought to be in agreement and was among those to whom O'Rourke sent his response letter.

Claire Palermo Flower, a spokeswoman for O'Rourke, said the county executive was not demanding their resignations. But he said the hospital board "has so traumatized their relationship with the new commissioner that unless they can find it in their heart to recant, I do not believe they can perform their charter duties."

The hospital board, along with

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O'Rourke's letter to board

This is the text of the letter Westchester County Executive Andrew O'Rourke sent to members of the hospital board:

I have received a copy of your letter of September 16, 1991 to the Board of Legislators regarding my appointment of Mack L. Carter to be Commissioner of Hospitals.

Considering the position you have taken, I cannot imagine your being able to fulfill your responsibilities under the Charter to advise me and the Commissioner of Hospitals. Accordingly, I would welcome your resignation from the Westchester County Medical Center Hospital Advisory Board. In order to assist you, a letter is enclosed for your signature along with a post-paid return envelope.

Ex "FF" X3

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the center's medical board, assailed Carter's appointment when it was announced Aug. 16, saying that acting Commissioner Edward Stolzenberg was more qualified.

Critics complained at that time about O'Rourke decision to bypass the three finalists named by a screening committee, saying the choice of Carter smacked of a political deal somehow related to O'Rourke's quest for a federal judgeship, a charge he denies.

"We're trifling with the lives of patients and careers of doctors ... all for a political goal no one quite understands," said Dr. George Reed, chairman of hospital's medical board.

Reed, who said Carter's appointment threatens the viability of the tax-supported medical center, said that the resignation of hospital board members would also hurt the institution.

"I think it's a very poor display of democracy in action," he said of O'Rourke's response. "I think it's a rather shocking display of lack of judicial temperament."

Hospital board members say while they know they have lost their battle to help Stolzenberg land the post, they have a responsibility to try to prevent Carter from taking the job.

His 18 years with New York City hospitals have not adequately prepared him to run a hospital system on the scale of the county medical center, according to the letter sent to legislators.

In his last position at Lincoln Medical and Mental Health Cen-

ter in the Bronx, he was a third-tier administrator whose duties were limited to daily operating and housekeeping needs of the hospital's patient services, the letter said.

"Hands-on management in such areas as: policy formulation, finances, labor relations, affiliation contracts, staffing, planning and numerous other areas which require specific experience and expertise are not within Mr. Carter's responsibilities and never have been in any of the positions he has held," the letter said.

Carter was not available for comment yesterday.

County Legislator Steve Tenore, R-New Rochelle, who chairs the Committee on County Officers and Departments, said yesterday that he would not call a confirmation hearing for Carter for at least two months.

"If he's not qualified, that should be proven," said Tenore, who said that both the hospital board and O'Rourke were handling the matter the wrong way.

He said he is willing to address the issue of how O'Rourke selects his commissioners at that time. And Tenore said that one man should not be able to ruin a hospital in a few months' time if it is running properly to begin with.

But board members fear that they will see their years of efforts to improve the institution go to waste.

"I understand he is a very nice man," board member Ellen Popper said, "but this is not a place for the man to do his training."

Nurses send petition to O'Rourke

About 300 nurses at Westchester County Medical Center signed a petition delivered to County Executive Andrew O'Rourke yesterday criticizing the process by which Mack L. Carter Jr. was selected as the new hospitals commissioner.

While not criticizing Carter, the Council of Nursing Practitioners expressed concern about how the selection was made and the furor it has sparked.

After spending \$50,000 on a search firm and asking a

screening committee to forward the most qualified candidates, O'Rourke chose Carter, whose name was not among the three finalists.

In an interview Tuesday, O'Rourke defended his decision, saying it was within his right as county executive to overrule the committee and make his own selection.

"I felt he would be good for the future of the hospital," he said.