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Hospital board's fate rests with county executive

O'Rourke to make decision by the end of the month

By Barbara J. Durkin
Staff Writer

The 15-member board that advises the Westchester County Medical Center is in a state of limbo, with four openings and four members uncertain whether they will be reappointed.

"We're losing our voice," said board member Ellen Popper, who is worried that the county is trying to quiet the board because it fought County Executive Andrew O'Rourke's appointment of Mack Carter as the new county hospitals commissioner.

O'Rourke, who appoints hospital board members, will either reappoint members or name new ones by the end of the month, said his spokeswoman, Kara Bennorth.

Two seats had been open for months. At the end of 1991, six others came up for reappointment.

O'Rourke in January notified Carol Farkas, the board's chairwoman, and Arthur Litt, vice chairman, that they would not be reappointed, but failed to name new members. Other hospital board members and some county legislators said they believed the pair were not reappointed because they led opposition to Carter.



Sanford Kaplan

Four other members, who also had voiced opposition, were not notified of their fate. Usually they continue to serve until told otherwise.

Richard Berensen, however, said he was uncomfortable continuing without knowing where he stood. He wrote O'Rourke asking for a decision.

"He wrote me back a letter saying 'I accept your resignation,'" Berensen said. "If he doesn't want me to sit on the board, that's fine. He should get off the dime and say 'I am not going to reappoint you. I'm not prepared to resign.'"

O'Rourke would not comment on the matter. Bennorth would only say that O'Rourke's letter indicates Berensen is off the board.

The others awaiting word are Ann McDonnell, Dr. Edwin Newman and Earl B. Moore.

"I do not think it is responsible for the county executive to allow the board to be without a quorum," said Dr. Sanford Kaplan, who serves as board secretary.

Kaplan, however, said that because the board's powers are limited, its lack of members would not cause too much difficulty for the hospital.

Joseph Colosimo, a board member who was appointed chairman when Farkas was dropped, said he didn't think the county was purposely trying to keep the board in the dark.

But he said he would welcome new members.

"We have a lot of work to do," he said.

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