



# THE TAOS NEWS

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## ‘Compromise’ on Holy Cross Hospital ICU

By Andrew Oxford

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Holy Cross Hospital will not increase the capacity of its intensive care unit but will train more nurses to care for patients with more severe medical needs, according to a plan administrators described as a compromise to address the concerns of medical staff after the unit was cut from five beds to two in September.

During a meeting Oct. 23, the hospital’s board of directors unanimously approved additional training for nurses in the four-bed observation unit.

The training would provide staff with skills equal to those of progressive care nurses and allow the unit greater flexibility, administrators said.

The plan also called for future positions in the intensive care unit to be filled by candidates to work as progressive care nurses and for shift supervisors to be qualified to provide assistance in the unit. The plan would be implemented by the end of the year.

These latest staffing changes follow the elimination of three beds in the intensive care unit during a round of cuts across the hospital in September.

Doctors subsequently raised concerns that two intensive care beds were inadequate.

“The hospital is having to transfer more patients,” Dr. John Foster said at a board meeting Sept. 25, citing the hesitance of some doctors to admit patients when the intensive care unit was at or near capacity.

The result was that more patients were having to leave Taos for care and that the hospital was losing revenue in the process, he added.

“Surgeons are not going to operate on patients if they feel they will warrant critical care in post-op if that ICU bed is not there,” he told board members.

At that meeting, Dr. Foster submitted a proposal supported by several medical staff to keep four beds open in the intensive care unit. Similar to the staffing changes approved Oct. 23, that plan also called for greater flexibility and additional training but suggested that four beds would be safer and potentially offer more revenue for the hospital.

Leaders of the union representing health care workers at Holy Cross told *The Taos News* that the board’s actions did not constitute a genuine compromise, however, and were doubtful training could be completed quickly.

Administrators said that expanding the intensive care unit after September's cuts was cost prohibitive and unnecessary.

The intensive care unit lost about \$800,000 during 2012 and was projected to lose \$240,000 this year, according to administrators who said they had considered closing the unit entirely.

A financial analysis conducted by the hospital and provided to board members, meanwhile, estimated the proposal presented by Dr. Foster would cost about \$182,000.

"The way we are going will cost us very little," CEO Peter Hofstetter stated in an email to *The Taos News*. "Just some internal training time."

He added that administrators would continue to conduct weekly reviews of the intensive care unit's capacity.