

Tucson Citizen

Pima Health System changes worry clients

HEIDI ROWLEY

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Pima Health System administrators addressed questions Friday from workers and clients concerned with the agency's proposal to transfer its 500-plus attendant care employees to community agencies.

About 100 people showed up at the meeting, which was the first of three planned to collect comments from workers and clients.

The 19-year-old attendant care program helps disabled and homebound clients with their nonmedical needs, such as getting out of bed, bathing and doing light housekeeping. Pima Health System made a proposal to the Pima County Board of Supervisors in December to transition services to outside agencies.

Instead of making a decision, the board asked for public hearings. The results of those hearings will be presented to the board in March, and the supervisors will make a decision at that time.

The top concern expressed by both clients and workers was continuity of care. Many clients said they were worried that they would not have the same worker, or that by changing agencies the worker would not be allowed to help them at the hours already designated.

Robin Gwozdz, manager of the attendant care program, said clients will

retain their current caseworkers, and those caseworkers will work with the potential agencies and workers to make sure everyone stays together.

Gerardo Olpineda, an attendant care worker who has three clients, still had concerns that each client would want a different agency and that it would be a hardship to get hired by, and then work for, three different agencies. Gwozdz responded that each situation would have to be handled individually.

Gwozdz emphasized several times during the meeting that while much of the work toward transition has been done, such as getting agencies to agree to take on the clients and employees, it will be the Board of Supervisors who decide whether the transition will happen at all.

Patricia Calderon, an attendant care worker who takes care of her mother said, "If it hasn't been done yet, I prefer it stays the way it is."

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

INPUT NEEDED

To give your input to Pima Health System on its proposal to transition the attendant care worker program to private agencies:

Go to a meeting:

- Feb. 9, 10:30 a.m., El Rio Neighborhood Center, 1390 W. Speedway Blvd.
- March 5, 6:30 p.m., Tucson Medical Center Senior Services, 1400 N. Wilmot Road.
- Call the attendant care hot line at 243-8055.
- Send an e-mail to attcare@pimahealthsystem.org or send a fax to 243-8453.

Information will be available on the Web site at www.pimahealthsystem.org.

- Contact the Pima County Board of Supervisors. For information log onto www.pima.gov.

Tucson Citizen

In-home aid clients concerned about plan to change program

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Clients and employees of Pima Health Systems are concerned about a proposal by the county public health agency to dismantle a program that provides in-home assistance to disabled clients.

The 19-year-old attendant care program helps disabled and home-bound clients with their nonmedical needs, such as bathing, getting out of bed and light housekeeping, said spokeswoman Jo Ann Siemsen.

In December, the agency proposed that the Pima County Board of Supervisors move those services to 21 private providers in the county.

Board Chairman Richard Elías said the supervisors and agency officials had talked about the issue but he realized more discussion was needed after he spoke with some clients of the program.

"I wasn't as informed as I thought I was to make a decision," he said Wednesday.

He has ordered public hearings to help educate clients, employees and the public on the issue as well as to gather input from the community. The first hearing will be 10:30 a.m Friday at the Herbert K. Abrams building,

3950 S. Country Club Road. Other hearings will be in February and March.

Janice Wallace, 38, who has been a client for 12 years, said she is concerned she will not be cared for during a transition phase or on weekends.

"Finding caregivers willing to work weekends and bedtimes has always been difficult," she said. "Of course, most people would like to have their evenings and weekends free, but I do not have the luxury of foregoing care during those times. I cannot just lie in bed waiting endless hours because caregivers are not available."

Siemens said the change would be better for the workers, who don't receive benefits from the county and may not be paid as well as they could be in the private sector.

Gerardo Olpineda, a representative of the Service Employees International Union and an attendant care worker, said he doesn't care about the added benefits.

"We care about the clients," he said. "It's not about us."

Elías said nothing has been determined and hopes that everyone affected has a chance to express concerns.
