

LA County

Hospitals Pushing Ballot Measure To Protect Trauma-Care Funding

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Staff Reporter

Health-care providers are again attempting to put before voters funding for emergency care, but this time they're going with a scaled-down measure targeting only L.A. County's trauma network.

The Healthcare Association of Southern California, after discussion with county health department officials, is proposing that the county place on the ballot a referendum raising funds for the financially strapped network, made up of three public and 10 private hospitals where serious accident victims are treated. The money would come from a surcharge on motor vehicle violations.

Earlier this year a coalition of health-care providers dropped a proposal for a statewide referendum to help fund emergency care after polls indicated the public was not prepared to support a statewide tax that would have raised \$300 million.

Both doctors and hospitals are taking huge financial hits because of the high number of uninsured patients treated at emergency rooms.

Health-care officials believe a ballot measure focusing only on L.A. County trauma hospitals has a better chance of passing since they save the lives of rich and poor alike.

"Even for emergency medical services the voters say no, but we think that trauma alone has a better chance," said Jim Lott, executive vice president of the regional hospital group pushing the measure.

The plan also calls for the establishment of a special district to collect and distribute the funds in an effort to eliminate any distrust voters may have over the county use of the funds for other purposes.

How much money the proposal would raise



TODD FRANKEL/LASJ

Troubled: Trauma funds needed.

depends on the level of the surcharge, as well as the specific motor vehicle violations on which it would be levied. Such violations would be targeted because there's a common belief of a connection between unsafe driving and the use of trauma care.

The plan was presented to Dr. Thomas Garthwaite, director of the county health department, and is being evaluated by health department officials before going to county supervisors.

Garthwaite said he was unsure how far the idea would go, but was supportive of improving the finances of trauma centers in principle.

It would take a vote by supervisors to put the referendum on the ballot and the support of a majority of county voters.

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