

# Woolsey hears Palm Drive request

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**ROBOTIC STIMULUS** — *Dr. James Gude (right) demonstrates his robot to Congresswoman Lynn Woolsey (D-CA) (left) as Palm Drive's CEO James Russell looks on (center). Woolsey recently visited the hospital to hear its plans for new medical records technology. - Photo by David Abbott*

According to the hospital's CEO James Russell, the district has signed a letter of intent to purchase an open source system from MedSphere, but lacks the start-up money to get EMR underway.

Board President Dan Smith thanked Woolsey for attending and gave her a brief history of the community ownership of the hospital.

Smith led the "group of 35," who put up \$1.5 million of the \$2.3 million price to purchase the facility in 2000. He explained the travails of the hospital and the manner in which its financial picture has brightened over the past year, thanks to a "stellar team" of management from the board to CEO James Russell. He also went on at length about the reopening of the ICU, and the hiring of Dr. James Gude who brought along his robotic telemetry.

Dr. Gude's system has allowed the hospital to expand its services from Ukiah to AZ, and Gude has even begun a school to teach robotics, "regrowing the capabilities of the hospital," Smith said.

Lynn Woolsey made an appearance at Palm Drive Hospital last Friday, fresh from her attendance at President Barack Obama's signing of the Lilly Ledbetter Equal Pay Act, so that hospital administrators could ask her for help funding electronic medical records (EMR) technology.

Obama's stimulus plan includes \$25 to \$50 billion in funding to upgrade health care record-keeping nationwide, and the district has requested \$1.7 million to purchase a new system based on the one used by the Veterans Administration.

But between the bad economic situation, and “difficult market issues,” which according to Smith, allows Kaiser to skim the profitable business leaving the community hospitals to pick up the bulk of indigent and under-insured patients.

“Kaiser needs to play the game too,” he said. “We can’t have closed medical systems.”

The way the system works now, according to Smith, is that community hospitals receive a lower rate of compensation for services — in Palm Drive’s case, as low as 21 cents on the dollar compared to 55 cents for Kaiser.

Smith called for “equal pay for equal work” for health care providers in order to level the playing field.

Woolsey said that it was the job of the government to address the structural inequalities, and hopes that the Obama Administration can start to address them.

Russell stressed the importance of rural hospitals and the role they play in saving lives, and that the hospital “desperately” needs an IT system.

“We’re at the leading edge of technology in the ICU (with robotic telemetry), but following in records systems,” he said.

Woolsey said she was unsure how the money in the upcoming stimulus package would be distributed — whether by allocation or competition — but believes that it will be allocated regionally, which means that health care providers in the North Bay may be in competition with San Francisco for limited funding.

She also said that it would behoove Palm Drive to get letters of support from the other hospitals in the Joint Powers Authority about the need for record sharing.

After a discussion about the importance of community hospitals, some programs Palm Drive is doing with very limited funding — such as staffing interventional psychologists who work with law enforcement — and support from the community from a 92 percent victory for the \$155 parcel tax, officials gave Woolsey a tour of the facility.

The Congresswoman said that she appreciated the sense of community associated with the hospital, and was impressed with the demonstration of robotic telemetry.