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## Health care task force continues to gather data

By *CLAUDINE SAN NICOLAS, Staff Writer*

WAILUKU – After two months of meetings, a new Maui panel is beginning to form ideas on what to recommend to improve the island's overall health care services.

The first of the Maui Health Care Initiative Task Force's mini-reports is due Saturday when the group gathers from noon to 3 p.m. at the West Maui Senior Center.

Meetings are open to the public and comments from residents around the island are welcomed, said task force Chairwoman Rita Barreras.

"We encourage people to come and tell us what they think," Barreras said.

The Maui Health Care Initiative Task Force was established by the state Legislature earlier this year with the passage of Act 219.

The group is charged with determining the county's current and future needs; developing an integrated plan for health care, including primary, acute, long-term care and acute and emergency care; and proposing an appropriate role for facilities on Maui, Lanai and Molokai, within the statewide system of emergency and trauma care.

The task force is required to submit its final report and any findings, recommendations and necessary proposed legislation to the

Legislature, the Maui mayor, and the State Health Planning and Development Agency before the start of the first legislative session in January.

In September, the group formed three committees to cover the following topics: primary/acute/emergency; disaster preparedness; and long-term care. The committees are expected to issue findings on needs in the respective areas Saturday in mini-reports during the meeting.

A deadline for final reports is Oct. 23.

Once the final reports are in, Barreras said, the task force will start working on its recommendations and final report targeted for its last meeting on Dec. 15. She said she hopes to have recommendations ready to submit to the Legislature.

At this point, the task force is collecting data on health care needs, with a bed needs study for Maui already in its files. Task force members have also heard presentations from administrators of Maui Memorial Medical Center, Kula Hospital, Lanai Community Hospital and from task force member Tony Krieg, administrator of Hale Makua, a Maui agency providing long-term-care services.

"We're reading, studying, talking to experts and really trying to understand," Barreras said.

Task force members also heard from several physicians, including Dr. Ron Kwon, the founder of Malulani Health Systems Inc., who continues to express interest in building a second hospital on Maui. Kwon suggested the task force recommend that his project be exempt from the State Health Planning and Development Act.

Barreras said task force members have yet to discuss specific issues such as whether a second hospital is appropriate for Maui, but she does expect the subject to come up soon.

For now, she said, the task force is concentrating on collecting information and processing it.

"There is no doubt that it is a challenge. I think we're going to do our best with the experience we have and the information we collect," Barreras said.

For more information on the task force, go online to [www.shpda.org](http://www.shpda.org) and link to Maui Health Care Initiative Task Force.

Written comments to the panel may be addressed to the Maui Health Care Initiative Task Force, c/o of the Hawaii Health Planning and Development Agency, 1177 Alakea St., Room 402, Honolulu 96813.

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