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Doctors Deliver Petition to the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors

Clinic physicians and psychiatrists working for the Santa Cruz County Health Services Agency have signed off on a message to the County Supervisors that begins: "The physicians of Santa Cruz County share a commitment to providing the highest quality health care to all county residents. Our negotiations have lead us to believe that County leadership does not value the role of physicians in providing that care."

They reached that conclusion based on the fact that the County has not done what is needed to recruit and retain doctors, despite having lost a substantial number of M.D.s since 2009. That was the year that furloughs and other cuts went into effect for County employees. Adding to the County's recruitment problem is the implementation of the Affordable Care Act, which has meant increased competition for the limited number of doctors working in the region. For example, the County has been trying to hire a child psychiatrist for nearly two years without success. Doctors who currently work for the County have expressed concerns that the short-staffing compromises the care that some patients receive.

Doctors have been in negotiations with the County for more than nine months. Doctors believe that modest contract improvements are necessary to entice doctors back to County jobs, but the County's current proposal contains significant takeaways. Both sides are scheduled to meet with a mediator on July 10th to see if an agreement can be reached.

UAPD does not accept management's claims that the County cannot afford to make the improvements necessary to attract doctors to county service. To provide mandated care despite the shortage of doctors, the County currently relies on outside contractors, who each cost up to \$225 per hour -- far more than a regular employee makes. Moreover, in the last two years, County doctors added more than \$400,000 in additional revenue to the county budget, by voluntarily contributing their portion of federal Electronic Health Record (EHR) incentive money to the County. That extra revenue could be used to help recruit and retain doctors to provide care.