



Kona Community Hospital should be fully operational by Friday

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After a week of cleaning, replacing ceiling tiles and painting, Kona Community Hospital will soon be fully operational again, possibly as early as Friday.

"Our priority is getting the patients back into the medical/surgical floor," said Eric Willis, regional facilities director.

All KCH medical/surgical patients were either discharged or transferred to Hilo Medical Center after the Oct. 15 earthquake, and the floor had been closed during damage assessments and clean-up.

Seven of the 33 medical/surgical beds have been opened and are full, with six additional beds ready to open by today, said Earl Greenia, assistant administrator and chief operating officer for Kona Community Hospital and Kohala Hospital. The goal is to have the remaining beds open by Friday, he added.

However, until all medical/surgical beds are open, there is still a possibility that a patient may be moved to Hilo Medical Center, depending on the patient's needs, Greenia said.

"We have more beds in the hospital, so we could move patients to other units, but if we've exhausted all possibilities, it may be necessary to move them to Hilo," he said.

All construction work has been completed in the facility's three operating rooms, with one room fully operational. The other two rooms still have some basic cleaning that needs to be done, and that should be completed by today as well, Greenia said.

The obstetrics unit has also reopened and the hospital's long-term care patients were returned to the facility Friday after spending the week at a conference room at the Sheraton Bay Resort and Spa.

"There was a tremendous effort on the part of our staff. They really pulled together and performed work that is outside of their usual scope, such as cleaning and moving furniture around," Greenia said.

In preparation for the Ford Ironman World Championship on Saturday morning, members of Hilo Medical Center's Hospital Emergency Response Team and the Strike Team of Hawaii Disaster Medical Assistance Team transported a 20-bed Acute Care Module to KCH.

The module includes two tents, lighting, casualty care litters and a heating, ventilation and air conditioning unit, and it will remain at the facility for another week before being moved to a permanent location in West Hawaii, possibly the Kona International Airport, for future emergency use, said Emily Mendez-Bryant, KCH spokeswoman.

"It took the team about three hours to set up, and it was utilized that afternoon for patient overflow," Mendez-Bryant said. "This was a good opportunity for us to see how the module is set up."

For other West Hawaii hospitals, the earthquake damage was not as significant, and things had returned to normal early in the week.

Kohala Hospital had damage to its entrance area, but structural engineers visited the facility Wednesday and deemed the building safe. The entrance area was restricted until support beams could be established, and that was done a day or two



Roberto Rabang, hospital security, and Emily Mendez-Bryant, community relations director, inside the acute care module in the Kona Community Hospital parking lot. The tent structures are air conditioned and equipped to take care of patients should more room be needed. - Baron Sekiya | West Hawaii Today

later, Mendez-Bryant said. There was no interruption of medical services during the week, she added.

During the week, North Hawaii Community Hospital administrators have found some small things that needed to be replaced, such as computer monitors and televisions, but there was no significant damage.

In addition, a few ceiling tiles needed to be replaced, the air conditioning unit had some leaks and flooded several areas, and the filtered water system that serves the dialysis unit was damaged, but everything has been fixed, cleaned or replaced.

"You can't even tell that anything has happened," said Stan Berry, NHCH chief executive officer. "We have also given temporary privileges to several Kona doctors so they can deliver babies or do surgeries, so our census has been higher, but probably because we're getting some Kona patients."

There were a few small cracks in the medical office and an engineer is coming to look at those this week. The earthquake also shook up the diesel fuel, causing pump damage, Berry said. The tank is being cleaned this week, and the hospital is using alternative fuel sources in the meantime.

Ka'u Hospital had minor cosmetic damage and clean-up work was finished early last week, said Marilyn Harris, Ka'u Hospital administrator.

"We were very, very lucky," she said.

Each medical facility administrator was encouraged by the response they had received from their communities and staff, and each felt their emergency disaster plans were right on target.

"There may be one or two changes on how rooms are used (during an emergency), but communications worked well," Berry said. "We used our recovery room as an alternative to the emergency department. We saw 150 patients on (Oct. 15), which is about four times more than we normally see, but it was all for minor injuries."

Greenia said KCH staff moved into disaster mode quickly, which is a large part of the plan. While administrators have not yet sat down to formally evaluate the hospital's response, it is something that will be done in the near future.

"We've had earthquake drills in the past and most of our drills involve partial or total evacuation, so in that sense, we were prepared," Greenia said. "But you're never going to get a sense of the physical damage during any drill. We had to deal with dust flying everywhere from ceiling tiles falling out and walls cracking."

A major challenge was the lack of communications, with phone service and radios out for the first hour or so, Willis said.

"A lot of us kept thinking we were going to get a lot of crush injuries coming in, so my priority was to get a triage set up outside," he said. "We had one (operating room) set up in a couple of hours."

For Ka'u Hospital, it was a perfect opportunity to have the experience without the major impact, Harris said. With a completely revised disaster plan recently created for the hospital, it was a valuable learning experience.

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