PHOTO BY AMY SYLVESTRI

Nurses protested at Kaiser in Hayward last week.

By Amy Sylvestri

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“Kaiser, Kaiser, be good. Keep pediatrics like you should,” chanted a few dozen protesters outside of the Kaiser Hospital in Hayward last Wednesday afternoon.

The protesters from the California Nurses’ Association (CNA) called attention to what is going to happen to the inpatient pediatrics unit at the Hayward hospital when Kaiser opens its new medical center in San Leandro.

In the next two years, the Hayward facility will close and overnight hospitalization of pediatric patients will only be available in Kaiser’s Oakland, Santa Clara, or Roseville hospitals – a commute that the CNA says will be a hardship on a family with a sick child – so the CNA is fighting to keep Hayward inpatient pediatrics open.

“The reality is that they are taking away a service to the families of this area,” said Liz Jacobs, a nurse with the CNA. “The nurses are very concerned. Kaiser is basically saying, ‘Look, you are going to have to drive for care.’ This is one of the most profitable hospital chains in the country, they can afford to keep the same level of care.”

Jacobs says that about 1,000 kids are hospitalized at the Hayward Kaiser hospital each year.

Kaiser says more beds will be added to the Oakland inpatient pediatrics unit to make up for losing the Hayward beds – the Oakland facility will have 35 beds and the Hayward facility currently has 20 beds.

In a written statement from Colleen McKeown, a Kaiser nurse and senior vice president, she calls the CNA campaign “irresponsible” and emphasized that young patients will still see their same doctor for checkups.

The new San Leandro Kaiser will have a labor and delivery unit and an emergency unit that is fully equipped to handle younger patients, who can then be transferred to the Oakland hospital. An outpatient pediatrics clinic is also planned for the new San Leandro hospital.

McKeown said that plans to consolidate pediatrics services is a good thing – with specialists and the latest technology all under one roof.

Jacobs said the consolidation of services at a handful of locations is precisely what the CNA is opposing and that, even with more beds, the Oakland facility will be strained and some patients might even have to go to a Kaiser hospital even farther away.

“That is a model of care that is of concern for nurses – focusing on profitable specialty care while having hospitalization at fewer locations, locations that are already very busy,” said Jacobs.

The CNA is planning another protest at Kaiser Hayward in late September.