

Security At Ventura County Medical Center

The sobering events of September 11, 2001 have brought to our nation's awareness and scrutiny the various aspects of our communities that would be most vulnerable to such subterfuge, such as hospitals. The Ventura County Medical Center is a public facility that by nature of its service is constantly bustling with people (some in a weakened state). The hospital serves a variety of needs to the community. It is open to the general public every day from 6AM to 8PM and to those in need of its services twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. The medical facility daily houses a large number of staff as well.

The Ventura County Grand Jury in its concern for the safety and security of those who use the Ventura County Medical Center (and may for a time be confined there) as well as that of the visitors and staff of the hospital, decided to look into the manner in which security is implemented at Ventura County Medical Center.

Through a series of unscheduled visits and impromptu interviews with hospital staff and security personnel, the Ventura County Grand Jury sought to determine just how effective security is at Ventura County Medical Center during normal and after-hours periods.

To that end, Grand Jurors visited Ventura County Medical Center on six separate occasions:

- December 21, 2002 (Friday, 10AM)
- January 26, 2002 (Saturday, 7PM)
- January 18, 2002 (Friday, 10AM)
- February 3, 2002 (Sunday, 12PM)
- February 9, 2002 (Saturday, 7:30PM)
- February 24, 2002 (Sunday, 2PM).

In the course of these visits, the Grand Jury members walked the length and width of the area outside the medical facility and observed (on each visit) two security guards patrolling the outside of the hospital, one guard walking and the other driving. The Grand Jurors learned that security is regularly stationed outside the hospital and that the perimeter of the building is routinely patrolled.

Four security cameras, positioned outside the hospital, relay a view of the hospital parking lots and adjoining streets to the security team housed within, near the hospital's emergency room entrance. Soon after entering the hospital (on each of their visits), the Grand Jurors were approached by a security officer who told the Grand Jurors (once they had identified themselves) they had been observed on overhead cameras. Observation cameras are positioned on the first

floor of the hospital. On subsequent walk-throughs of the facility, the Grand Jurors found cameras to be in place on every floor of the hospital.

The Ventura County Medical Center is manned with sixteen (16) cameras in all. The surveillance equipment is of such sophistication that the security people (within the hospital) were able to quickly identify the vehicles of the Grand Jurors' (parked in three locations near the hospital), and read clearly the license plate numbers on the visiting Grand Jurors' cars. Graphs and diagrams of emergency exits are visible on the walls of every floor of Ventura County Medical Center. The hospital elevators all had working phones.

The Grand Jurors found the Intensive Care Unit (as a policy) locked to visitors; to gain entrance you must ring the nurse. The Pediatrics Unit was locked as well and required a nurse to provide entrance. On an evening visit, other wings of the hospital were also found to be locked down that might otherwise be open during regular visiting hours.

Notices are posted throughout the hospital that ALL doors are locked at 8PM (after visiting hours). The lighting inside the hospital and around the building's outside areas provided clear visibility. A security officer is available to walk anyone to his or her car that requests that courtesy. A nurse who in passing saw the Grand Jurors near the Pediatrics wing, stated that she feels quite safe and comfortable at Ventura County Medical Center, day or night, knowing that the cameras are always on. The nurse only sometimes asks for an escort to her vehicle (in the very late or early hours of the day).

On each of their visits, the Grand Jurors saw police cars parked in the emergency room area of the hospital. When asked, a security officer explained that should a problem or disturbance occur it would most likely come from the emergency room area and that in such cases there is usually a law officer accompanying the unruly patient.

When questioned about the hospital security plans, should a power shortage or energy shut-down occur, a supervisor of the security team assured that under such circumstances emergency generators would activate automatically within no less than ten seconds (and that in any event medical personnel were trained to take over emergency equipment manually should the need arise).

Through their visits to Ventura County Medical Center the Grand Jury found:

- A. Security personnel are assigned to key areas within the facility and, as stated, without. All security personnel communicate with each other via hand held radios.
- B. All employees and staff of the hospital that were visible during the Grand Jury's visits were wearing a badge with a clear identifying photo and name.
- C. The traffic outside the facility was flowing in a regular manner, no vehicles were observed to be parked illegally or otherwise blocking key entrances to the hospital such as the emergency room entrance or patient loading and unloading areas.

- D. The Ventura County Medical Center closes to the general public at 8 P.M. An announcement is made throughout the hospital notifying visitors of that fact and that their compliance is necessary as a security measure.
- E. On each of the Grand Jury's visits the Jurors noted that the nurses' stations on every hospital floor had at least one employee present.

The 2001-2002 Ventura County Grand Jury has taken an informative and conclusive look at Ventura County Medical Center's security effort and found Ventura County Medical Center's security policy to be professionally efficient and in every manner up to par.

The security team at Ventura County Medical Center impressed the Grand Jurors as alert, keenly aware of their surroundings and more than capable.

No Recommendations.

No Response Required