

Barton initiates furlough weeks

By Kathryn Reed



Barton Health employees are being told this week they must take three weeks off — one in October, one in November and one in December.

The 25 percent cut in pay comes on the heels of 43 employees being laid off earlier this year. At that time it left the medical conglomerate with 946 employees.

Reached late Wednesday night, Barton public relations head Monica Sciuto did not have the number of full-time employees who will be affected by the latest cutbacks. She did say it does not affect people who administer patient care.

Doctors are not employees of Barton, so therefore were never going to be part of the latest round of cuts. Some nurses will, however, be taking three weeks of furlough for the last quarter of 2009.

Sciuto said the numbers are still being crunched as to what the exact savings will be. She found out about the forced leave on Wednesday morning.

She said a number of the employees have accrued paid time off so they can use those hours to offset the forced leave. This would essentially mean no reduction in pay for some, but no paid vacation or sick time down the road either.

It will be newer employees and those without accrued time off who will feel the financial hit the most, as well as couples who work for Barton.

The furlough hits CEO John Williams and the administrative team, the PR department â€“ anyone who doesnâ€™t work directly with patients.

Some employees and community members question why Williams, who makes close to a half million dollars a year, has not taken a pay cut. More than a dozen Barton workers make more than \$100,000 a year (not including benefits or bonuses) â€“ but salaries have not been tweaked.

With the next fiscal year beginning Jan. 1, itâ€™s not known if the 25 percent reduction in work will be enough to keep the hospital financially healthy.

Besides the number of patients continuing to decline, the number of uninsured seeking medical care keeps escalating. Sciuto said in August the patient census was down 13 percent from a year ago and September is expected to be that bad or worse.

This time last year the hospital had accrued \$1.8 million in charity care â€“ people who donâ€™t pay their bill. In 2009, that figure is \$3.6 million.

Sciuto said people accessing Barton services should not notice a difference. In fact the community clinic has added Saturday hours to accommodate the number of people needing it.

Asked if the health care system regretted buying all the medical practices in the last couple of years, Sciuto said, â€œThat is a question better answered by John (Williams), but I have not heard any regrets.â€

As for consolidating services like the multiple physical therapy practices, Sciuto could see the subject being broached

in the future, but has not heard talk of it.

It will be up to department managers to schedule the days off so it runs smoothly “ meaning employees might work half days, take Fridays off or some other creative way to account for working one less week a month for three months.