

BLACK LIVES MATTER: CIR LEADERS HELP ORGANIZE A MULTI-DISCIPLINARY GRAND ROUNDS at SFGH

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On March 5th, one day after the #whitecoats4blacklives day of action, San Francisco General Hospital (SFGH) held grand rounds entitled “Patient and Provider Rights: Interacting Law Enforcement in the Healthcare Setting” to formulate strategies for interacting with law enforcement within the hospital. In particular, the panel focused on patient rights and safety when faced with law enforcement’s over-use of force.

Residents Saw a Need

The 2014 tragedy involving SFGH patient Lynne Spaulding, who died under the SF Sheriff’s watch, as well as daily interactions involving both sheriff and police presence at SFGH and UCSF, prompted many residents, physicians and nurses to organize on behalf of patient safety. CIR leaders were at the forefront of planning, along with STEP UP. “We needed to know more,” said CIR leader Dr. Diana Wu, “We are the advocates for our patients and we didn’t know how to advocate for them. We had a lot of questions about the law, about our rights as healthcare providers, and how we could protect our patients and give them the best care.”

The grand rounds panel was composed of experts from the Office of Risk Management, lawyers from the Department of Public Health, and SF Medical Legal Aid. The presentation was a series of five vignettes, highlighting real events in which healthcare providers previously did not know how to respond. Members of the panel answered a range of questions, “How do we give the best care if the patient is handcuffed?” “How do we file complaints about the use of excessive force?” “Who is in power on hospital property – the officer or leading physician?”

“Some of the role confusion was cleared up. Law enforcement and healthcare providers have very different goals and there is a huge difference in training and accountability,” Dr. Wu said. “This mis-alignment between law enforcement and hospital administration is detrimental to patient safety and the grand rounds helped siphon through the differences. We had to learn how to speak in their [law enforcement’s] language.”

Now SFGH and UCSF residents are well-prepared for events ranging from how to speak with law officials on the phone, “When speaking with law enforcement, the key is to be very specific, such as, ‘I need you here as backup in case this situation escalates.’ Or, ‘we need you in this room for stand-by,” Dr. Wu explained. Other drills included how to file a complaint against law enforcement (go through the Office of Citizen Complaints), how to ask for the right help during an emergency de-escalation, and how to give the best patient care while a patient is in custody.

CIR members are advocates for patient lives and safety and the grand rounds were hugely successful in affording healthcare providers, as well as the SFGH community, the knowledge and training necessary for real-life events associated with law enforcement injustices.

About the Committee of Interns and Residents (CIR/SEIU Healthcare)

Founded in 1957, the Committee of Interns and Residents (CIR/SEIU Healthcare) is the oldest and largest resident physician union in the U.S., representing more than 15,000 physicians in public and private teaching hospitals across the country. CIR empowers resident physicians to have a voice in their employment and training and to be advocates for their patients.