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Agreement with Disability Rights Advocates Puts Sutter in the Lead in Hospital Access

BERKELEY, Calif., April 18, 2008 - Disability Rights Advocates (DRA), private co-counsel, and Sutter Health today announced that the Sutter network of hospitals, medical foundations and other health care service providers has taken a big legal step toward further improving health care access for patients with mobility, visual, hearing and speech disabilities who seek care from Sutter facilities.

After working collaboratively, DRA; the Oakland-based civil rights law firm of Goldstein, Demchak, Baller, Borgen & Dardarian; and the network have reached a comprehensive agreement to do the following:

- * Survey every Sutter health care facility in California to assess ways to improve physical access to those buildings and grounds, and make the required improvements within the next ten years;
- * Further develop and implement policies and procedures to address the needs of persons with disabilities; and
- * Develop plans for purchasing medical equipment specifically designed to accommodate patients with disabilities, and then execute on those plans.

The comprehensive agreement, when approved by the court, will resolve a class-action lawsuit filed to address these issues.

The lawsuit was not a hostile action. Since November 2005, Sutter Health has engaged in voluntary, structured discussions with DRA and Goldstein, Demchak, who represent Sutter patients and visitors with mobility, visual, hearing and speech disabilities. Together, the parties have developed systems to help ensure Sutter-affiliated organizations are moving toward ongoing, optimal compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) access requirements. The lawsuit was filed in December 2006 to secure court-approval of the agreement and to gain legal protections for the parties.

"While people expect that hospitals and other medical environments will be accessible to people with disabilities, this is often not the case," said Melissa Kasnitz, the managing attorney at DRA who worked with Sutter to negotiate the agreement. "We are extremely

pleased with the commitments being made by Sutter, which, when implemented, will make it a leader in access in the health care industry."

"On behalf of our clients, we commend Sutter for its significant commitment announced today and urge other health care providers to follow Sutter's example – for the good of all Californians," said Linda M. Dardarian, partner at Goldstein, Demchak.

"This kind of settlement is routine in resolving ADA-related issues where multiple public facilities are affected, and it further advances our organizations' mutual goals. It places a stamp of approval on our Sutter network's comprehensive compliance plans," said Gary Loveridge, Sutter Health senior vice president and general counsel.

Sutter Health already has implemented the following steps to further address physical access, accessibility of medical equipment, staff training and policy issues:

- * Retained an architectural access consultant to survey affiliate facilities to identify opportunities for physical improvement (Surveys are underway.)
- * Retained a consultant with expertise in disability policy and program design to provide content and guidance regarding employee training and organizational policies
- * Hired a systemwide ADA coordinator to further improve health care access for people with disabilities - now and in the future
- * Established a working committee to develop survey tools to assess existing medical equipment and make recommendations on purchase of new accessible medical equipment
- * Established a steering committee to coordinate the implementation of activities to improve access to medical services by disabled patients

"We're making significant advancements to our facilities, processes and tools to help ensure all patients have easy access to quality health care services," said Loveridge. "Quality patient care is our top priority, and our work with a reputable, dedicated organization like DRA reflects this commitment."

Named plaintiff Stephen Olson, who uses a wheelchair for mobility, expressed his satisfaction with the agreement. "In my previous visits to one Sutter hospital, I have had difficulty maneuvering in my wheelchair, and I have been unable to be weighed or examined on a table," said Olson. "Knowing that these problems, as well as policies for dealing with the needs of people with physical disabilities, are going to be addressed gives me much greater confidence for my future health care needs."

Disability Rights Advocates is a non-profit law firm based in Berkeley, California, whose mission is to protect and advance the civil rights of people with disabilities through high-impact litigation, advocacy and education. Disability Rights Advocates is a national

leader in protecting the rights of people with all types of disabilities, including mobility, sensory, mental health and learning disabilities.

Goldstein, Demchak, Baller, Borgen & Dardarian, is an Oakland, California based law firm which represents plaintiffs nationally in complex and class action litigation, including civil rights, employment discrimination, wage and hour, disability access, environmental, consumer, and other public interest class actions. Goldstein, Demchak, founded in 1972, is one of the most successful private plaintiffs' public interest firms in the United States.

Sutter Health is a family of not-for-profit hospitals and physician foundations that share resources and expertise to advance health care quality. Serving more than 100 communities throughout Northern California, the Sutter Health network is a regional leader in cardiac care, cancer treatment, orthopedics, obstetrics, and newborn intensive care, and is a pioneer in advanced patient safety technology. For more information, visit www.sutterhealth.org.

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