

O'Rourke mishandled selection at hospital

Whether Mack L. Carter Jr. is qualified to be Westchester's new hospital commissioner is not the point.

Whether Carter, an 18-year veteran of the New York City hospital system, is more qualified or less qualified than Edward Stolzenberg, the acting hospital commissioner in Westchester, is not the point either. Those are matters better left to the Westchester Board of Legislators, which must decide whether to confirm County Executive Andrew P. O'Rourke's appointment of Carter and to the medical people who would work with him at the Westchester Medical Center, the Ruth Taylor Institute and the Mental Retardation Institute, all at the Grasslands reservation in Valhalla.

The bigger point: O'Rourke has badly bungled the way he handled his task to select a successor to Bernard Weinstein, who announced his retirement 14 months ago. O'Rourke allowed Weinstein to stay a few days into January this year so he could collect \$48,662 more in unused sick leave and vacation pay.

In selecting Carter, the deputy executive director of Lincoln Medical and Mental Health Center in the Bronx, O'Rourke broke at least two of the rules he himself had laid down in the selection process. He did not select one of the three people originally recommended to him by a selection committee. He did not select a chief executive officer of a hospital.

O'Rourke's excuse? One of the three dropped out, so he interviewed seven other people, including Carter. One might ask: Why didn't he ask the selection committee for a third name? And if O'Rourke was going to make the decision in the manner he did, why did the county have to spend \$50,000 for a search organization and empanel a selection committee comprised of key hospital volunteers and members of his administration?

O'Rourke's management style this time might be called "a whim and a prayer."

By his handling of the matter, O'Rourke has made it more difficult for Carter to get along with the medical people at the hospital — assuming Carter's nomination is confirmed by the Board of Legislators, as it most likely will be, based on his track record. O'Rourke has dug a moat between them.

He disregards own rules for picking commissioner.

Dr. George Reed, the head of the hospital's Medical Board, criticized the appointment. And two members of the selection committee, Carol Farkas, the

chairwoman of the medical center's advisory Hospital Board, and Dr. Samuel Kasoff, a member of the hospital's Medical Board, said they viewed Stolzenberg as the most-qualified candidate. Stolzenberg was one of the three finalists recommended by the selection committee.

O'Rourke has also made it more difficult for committed and well-intentioned citizens of Westchester to serve on advisory boards and selection committees.

Finally, he has made it more difficult for Stolzenberg to stay on as the No. 2 man at the hospital, as he was under Weinstein. Stolzenberg indicated he now expects to leave by the end of the year.

We hope not. Stolzenberg has been a talented and valuable staff member at the hospital for almost a dozen years and is highly respected and liked by its staff. O'Rourke himself praised Stolzenberg's efforts this year to help put together a plan to save St. Agnes Hospital in White Plains from closing.

The Westchester Medical Center needs leadership and direction. Most of all, it needs to break the political yoke that county government has placed around it. Had there been more independence, the selection process might have been smoother and quicker.

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