

Supervisors vote to cut adult day care program -- after the holidays

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The ElderLife adult day care program offered by Kern Medical Center will end on Jan. 31.

Supporters of the program and the mental, physical and social healthcare it offers the 60 people who use its services begged the Kern County Board of Supervisors on Tuesday to keep the state-funded program alive with county money.

"I don't want to stay home. I love it there. They treat me great," Joe Rayner told supervisors, after choking back emotion. "I've been in two nursing homes. They treated me like a dog."

Supervisors acknowledged the program's special services and the role it plays in the lives of seniors and the disabled, but pointed the finger of accusation northward as they tried to explain to supporters why the program must close.

ElderLife was funded largely by Medi-Cal but supplemented by other groups including Kern Medical Center.

But the state has removed adult day care programs from the list of programs funded by Medi-Cal.

And the county is struggling with the idea of funding the \$1.15 million bulk of the program's cost on its own.

Supervisor Jon McQuiston said that to fund ElderLife, supervisors would have to take from somewhere else -- possibly gang prevention efforts or senior nutrition programs that provide meals and socialization for thousands of Kern County seniors.

Maggard bemoaned the fact the state refuses to fund programs like ElderLife, forcing county governments to either use local funds to continue them or to cut them. But it is the county who hears from people like Rayner, Maggard said.

Kern Medical Center Chief Executive Officer Paul Hensler recommended that supervisors keep the program, which loses state funding on Dec. 1, going through the end of January to help families make it through the holidays.

Supervisors agreed.

The only long-term hope for the program, supervisors acknowledged, would be for the state to re-instate funding for adult day care.

Hensler said a planned settlement of a lawsuit brought against the state in the hopes of blocking the cuts doesn't leave much hope that will happen.

Rayner's daughter Shelia Bradford said she doesn't know what the family is going to do without ElderLife.

"I'll stay home," Rayner said.

But Bradford said that when her father stayed at home, he lost muscle tone in his legs and struggled to walk. He slept most of the day and sank into depression.

At ElderLife he is engaged and able to have fun and hang out with friends, she said.