

State Water Resources & Control Board Meeting

8/14/17

Remarks by Peter Hall, R.N.

My name is Peter Hall. I'm a registered nurse. For the past 17 years I've worked at the UC San Diego Medical Center where, currently, I'm a nurse manager. I'm here today to join with others in demanding that there is a complete and permanent cessation of the practice of shutting off people's water as a result of their inability to pay their bills.

Water, like oxygen, is a fundamental component of life. A human being can live longer without food than without water. Even moderate dehydration can cause dizziness, fatigue and hypotension. In any person, these symptoms can impair productivity and endanger health.

A lack of access to water, however, is especially concerning when it comes to the elderly population. As we age, our body's ability to store fluid diminishes. So, staying hydrated becomes even more dependent on having ready access to drinking water. An elderly person may not have the money to buy any kind of beverage outside the home. But, an even greater danger is the fact that many seniors simply don't have the mobility to leave their homes at all without difficulty. Coupled with the weakness that comes with dehydration, this could easily lead to a state of being completely homebound and exclusively dependent upon tap water for hydration. Shut the water off ... and a downward spiral is triggered – dehydration, hypotension, weakness, confusion, falls, organ shut down and death. This is a particular risk during a heat wave. Shutting an elderly person's water off is the moral equivalent of shoving that person down a flight of stairs.

A second, staggering, concern is the crisis of sanitation that can be spawned when people's water is shut off. San Diego County is currently facing a hepatitis A epidemic, the likes of which have not been seen in California for two decades. According to the County Department of Health, San Diego has seen 312 cases of hepatitis A so far this year. This has resulted in 10 deaths and 215 hospitalizations. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention identifies poor hygiene, especially handwashing, as a primary risk factor to the spread of the disease. Households, and even neighborhoods, in which there is a lack of sanitary resources- a lack of water, for example – can become sources of infection. People living in these conditions are often food handlers in the restaurants, stores and cafeterias that we all frequent. They may also be caregivers for our loved ones. If a worker becomes infected at home he or she will carry it into these environments.

Given these issues, I stand with those who demand that all water shut-offs be prohibited now and in the future. I understand that a policy is being considered that would help with 20% or, in some circumstances, 35% of a qualifying person's or family's bill. That doesn't solve the problem. A family that is scrapping together money for food

is not going to be able to afford 80% of its bill any more than it could the entire thing. The outcome will be the same.

I believe that public funds should be used to guarantee basic access to water for all those who live in the city and county. However, I don't feel that I, or other people who dutifully pay their taxes, should shoulder this burden. I believe that the time has come to make those corporate entities, which are currently the beneficiaries of some very generous tax arrangements, start paying their fair share, instead of burdening poor workers and other taxpayers. Thank you.