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Donation: Hospital contributes \$24,000 to homeless services group

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Amid the outcry over alleged dumping of discharged hospital patients on Skid Row, one downtown Los Angeles hospital has reached out to a homeless services provider outside the downtown core.

Good Samaritan Hospital, which is not among hospitals accused of patient dumping, last week donated \$24,000 to People Assisting the Homeless to formalize a relationship developing over the past several weeks.

We're all responsible within the community for taking care of these patients, but we need help, said hospital Chief Executive Andy Leeka. PATH is a wonderful place, great in what it does. And we believe they'll be a great partner in helping these patients when they're ready to be discharged from the hospital.

Patient discharge workers at Good Samaritan will be able to call on PATH to assist discharged homeless patients who do not have an alternative location in which to recuperate. In return, the hospital will help PATH's own health clinic obtain free or reduced price medications, and if needed, treat PATH clients at the hospital.

It's not the responsibility of hospitals to become homeless service agencies, said PATH Chief Executive Joel Roberts. They need to be able to discharge patients to a caring professional provider who can take care of them. Any services we may get in return from the hospital is just icing on the cake for us.

PATH, which provided transitional housing and social services for more than 10,000 homeless last year, is known for its innovative service delivery model, providing space to 20 public and private agencies at its regional center on the east edge of Silver Lake. The program also offers 200 shelter beds at the main facility and satellites in Hollywood and West L.A.

The program is considered a model for homeless service providers, with Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa going there last month to announce his proposal to spend \$4.6 million to fund 372 new emergency shelter beds.

The hospital-PATH partnership is one outcome of a hospital staff task force that for months has been studying ways for Good Samaritan to better deal with homeless and other uninsured patients who began flooding private hospital emergency rooms two years ago because of county financial problems. Those problems prompted the county to close several county clinics and restrict private hospitals from transferring indigent patients to county hospitals.

Uncompensated care, much of it for homeless patients, costs Good Samaritan's emergency room \$10 million a year, said Leeka. The additional patients forced the hospital to convert office space into triage facilities to handle the larger case load.