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Hospital Defends Policies On Sterilizing Women

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Hartford Hospital officials reacted cautiously Friday to a federally funded survey that found half of 153 Puerto Rican women in two poor city neighborhoods were sterilized.

Of 26 women questioned a second time in depth about sterilization, 22 said they had been sterilized at Hartford Hospital.

Hospital public information officer James Battaglio did not reject the report, but said the hospital planned no changes in response to recommendations proposed in the study.

"It's too contained and too confined," Battaglio said. "It draws conclusions from small segments of the community."

He added, however, "We interpret the report as saying the medical system, not just Hartford Hospital, must be more expansive" in the area of health education."

The random survey was conducted over a year's time by the Hispanic Health Council in the Charter Oak Terrace/Rice Heights and Park Street/South Green neighborhoods. The Council released the 52-page study Friday at press conference, recommending, among several things, a comprehensive health program for women.

Council officials said they believe the incidence of sterilized Puerto Rican women is too high. They also said the results of their survey were corroborated by a separate, recently completed

study by a researcher connected with the University of Connecticut Health Center, which found that 54 percent of Hispanic women of child-bearing age in Charter Oak Terrace had been sterilized.

Council officials did not blame the hospital for sterilizing the women and said other factors, such as the lack of birth-control information, boosted the sterilization rate.

But they said the data raised the question of whether the public health establishment adequately serves the poor. In some cases, women told interviewers they signed consent forms authorizing sterilization without fully understanding it.

Battaglio said the hospital's sterilization procedure is as thorough as possible, including a bilingual consent form, Spanish-speaking interpreters during counseling and a minimum 30-day waiting period for patients on government assistance, a federal requirement.

The study's other recommendations included more effective monitoring of the federal guidelines on sterilization, a minimum 60-day waiting period between the signing of the consent form and the operation and additional research on the issue.