

The Reliable Source

Amy Argetsinger and Roxanne Roberts, Columnists

Britney Watch, Cont'd

By [Amy Argetsinger and Roxanne Roberts](#)

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Britney Spears was whisked from her Los Angeles home early yesterday by an ambulance with a massive police escort and admitted to a psychiatric hospital in the most public and dramatic celebrity meltdown since -- well, since she was carted to the hospital on a gurney just four weeks ago.

Is *this* the rock bottom everyone's been waiting for? And is anything different this time?

Answers remained elusive yesterday, as the most over-reported saga in showbiz collided with the culture of confidentiality that shrouds most mental health cases.

Video images of the bizarre 1 a.m. parade -- an ambulance with blacked-out windows, flanked by more than a dozen officers in cars, on motorcycles and in helicopters -- filled the airwaves and gossip Web sites yesterday. What's known: that the troubled pop star, 26, was taken to [UCLA Medical Center](#) for what the [L.A. Times](#) reported was a "mental health evaluation hold," which typically involves a 72-hour stay.

What's unclear: whether Spears was forcibly committed or went voluntarily. Various publications reported that her hospital trip followed a carefully coordinated intervention that involved her mother, her manager, lawyers and a friend.

Also unclear: what happens next.

Things sure looked pretty serious when Spears was forcibly committed Jan. 3, after weeks of erratic behavior and a four-hour barricade with her toddler son. (Ex-husband [Kevin Federline](#) has had custody of their two young boys since October.)

But she was released after just a day -- and was off on another binge of shopping sprees, abandoned cars, strange costumes and an apparent fling with one of the guys from the paparazzi mob that has chronicled every step of her sad journey.

Are things different this time? The unusual show of law enforcement strength certainly gave the impression that this was a big deal. But an [LAPD](#) spokesman told us the police escort was simply "for the community's safety" -- to keep this incident from turning into another of the paparazzi traffic jams Spears tends to create.

Gossip publications have described a feud between Spears's manager and her sometimes-estranged parents over who has control of her affairs -- a question that could end up in court. But experts told us that how long Spears stays in the hospital will largely be determined by doctors. They could decide to let her go before the standard three days -- or to keep her beyond that period, involuntarily, though she would have the legal right to appeal.

For Spears to be committed in the first place, a doctor had to determine that she suffered mental illness and posed a danger to herself or others, said **Carolyn Reinach Wolf**, a legal mental-health expert in [N.Y.C.](#) And not necessarily a homicidal or suicidal danger, she said: "It can be putting yourself in a dangerous situation, not taking care of yourself, being provocative, not dressing appropriately for the weather." Which will all sound familiar to any regular reader of [TMZ.com](#).