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Change in the Wind?

For those of you have seen Michael Moore's movie *Sicko*, as I did recently, you may have come away entertained since Moore certainly injected a good dose of humor into the production. But for those of us who have committed our lives to delivering high quality health care in public health systems, the movie has a sad message: the United States spends more money on health care than any other industrialized nation and we have worse outcomes.

That's the bad news, but I actually have some reason to believe that change might be in the offing and that somewhere in the next decade, we may see a dramatic reform to the health care system in California that would allow every resident of our state to have access to the health care they need.

Board of Supervisors leading the way

Obviously reform in our health care system isn't going to happen on the local level. Nearly all of the funding for our health care system – 85% – is from state and federal sources, mostly Medi-Cal. So the reform would have to begin there and both the Governor and the Legislature seem to be seriously considering options. I'll talk more about that in a minute.

Last month, our Board of Supervisors, lead by Supervisors Susan Bonilla and Mary Piepho, co-chairs of the Board's Legislative Subcommittee, took an extraordinary step. With proposals for health care reform swirling in Sacramento, they adopted five principles (see sidebar on page two) for reform that were developed by stakeholders from every segment of Contra Costa, including unions, businesses, community-based organizations and community clinics. Saying that counties want to work in partnership to ensure the success of health care reform, the Board pointed out that health care reform efforts could result in unintended negative consequences for County health services and patients. The principles set parameters for ensuring that our "unique and successful" public health care system is protected in whatever legislation moves forward to implement reform.

Supervisor John Gioia has shared the principles with other counties and a number

of them are considering adopting them as well.

Sacramento percolating

As health care reform moves forward, it is critical that the details of the



Dr. Walker

reform be carefully considered. For the past year, in my role as president of the California Association of Public Hospitals, I have spent many hours talking with health care officials, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, his staff and legislators to ensure that any proposals that move forward reflect the principles that would protect public health systems.

The intent of the Governor's plan is good: to create a source of funding which would be matched by federal dollars to increase Medi-Cal reimbursement rates and expand Medi-Cal eligibility. I have said from the beginning that if everything happened as proposed, it could be successful.

The issue is not whether the system needs to be reformed. In my mind, that has always been a given, but as they say, the devil is in the details and there are many details that must all come together to make the new strategy work. Without boring you with mind boggling details, let me just say what drives the funding for the reform are fees that would be charged to hospitals, physicians and businesses. In the Governor's plan, \$1 billion would also be taken statewide from counties.

At the moment, there is no pending legislation that represents the Governor's plan. The only legislation – AB 8 — doesn't require

Continued next page

DID YOU KNOW

Between **94,000** and **122,000** adults in Contra Costa County have no health insurance.

Director's Message Continued...

any county funding but relies on a higher fee levied on businesses. Obviously there is opposition from the California Chamber of Commerce and the business community to that legislation.

Cause for optimism – and concern

In my career as a physician and a health administrator, I have never seen the possibility of comprehensive health care reform be so tantalizingly close. But by the time you read this message, we will be only two weeks from the end of the legislative session, by which time the final bill must be crafted. That isn't much time for such a complex issue, and the Legislature's inability to finalize a budget could put health care reform on the back burner.

And even if that doesn't happen, I am really concerned that in the middle of the night at the end of the session, when chaos often strikes the Legislature, compromises will be made where everyone will say, "Don't take my money." In that scenario, the easiest target might be the \$1 billion counties could be forced to pony up.

If county funding is used to create insurance without an acknowledgement of the obligations the counties already have to provide health care, then we could be left holding the bag. We do believe that counties should contribute – but down the road if everything else is working and in place.

Our unique system

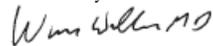
Michael Moore's movie about health maintenance organizations doesn't acknowledge that public agencies like ours – not driven by profit motives – can deliver cost effective quality care to those who need it the most. Our Health Plan is a shining example of that.

We've learned some things over the years in Contra Costa about the most effective way to deliver health care. We've learned that giving people an insurance card and saying they are covered doesn't solve the problem of access. To have effective health care for everyone, we have to maintain capacity and even expand it.

For years, because of the commitment of our Board of Supervisors and in spite of rising costs and increasing regulations and challenges, we have provided access (not insurance) to an ever-increasing number of uninsured in this county. This fall, we will use our new three-year Health Care Coverage Initiative (see separate story) to expand access to the uninsured. This comprehensive approach to serving the uninsured doesn't just give the person a card and say "good luck" – it stresses case and care management, prevention and quality of care.

One question will be how this system – to be in place for the next three years – plays out against the reforms being proposed in AB 8. Meanwhile, go see *Sicko* and see what you think.

Sincerely



William Walker, MD

Principles for Action

The Board of Supervisors recently adopted five principles for health care reform, emphasizing that "first and foremost, health care reform should 'do no harm' to Contra Costa County's unique and successful public health care system."

- Diversion of county financial resources is not the first step to health care reform
- Medi-Cal reimbursement rate increases are fundamental to increasing health care coverage
- Hospital, clinic and provider capacity must be addressed
- Cost containment must be a fundamental part of reform
- Contra Costa's public health system is unique and successful

A complete explanation of the principles is available on our website at cchealth.org – *WW*

Health Care Coverage Initiative Launched

It took weeks to prepare the grant application for a new state program that expands insurance coverage to people who are uninsured. It's taken months to work out the details and navigate the state requirements for the new insurance initiative that is being launched this month. Contra Costa was awarded \$46 million in federal funds through the California Department of Health Services for the three-year pilot program. Our Health Plan will be the linchpin of the new Health Care Coverage Initiative, supplementing CCHS' services with services available at La Clinica and Brookside Community Health Center. Some of our staff have worked long hours to ensure that the systems are in place to issue enrollment cards and get the online application and other materials ready.

The Director's Report is published monthly. Deadline for the October edition is September 12. Publicize your upcoming events and successes by sending information to Dan Smith at 597 Center Avenue, Suite 255, Martinez 94553, fax 925-313-6219, email: dsmith@hsd.cccounty.us The Director's Report is available online at cchealth.org and on iSite, our intranet, at cchs.

GOING THE EXTRA MILE FOR SERVICE EXCELLENCE

Honor Roll

Bette Lucey, PHN

Medically Vulnerable Infant Program
Public Health

For her compassion and commitment to serving vulnerable infants and their families for 35 years. She serves residents of Contra Costa with grace, integrity and expertise.

— Nominated by Dawn Dailey

Herolinda Gonzalez

Community Health Worker II
Public Health Clinic Services

For her excellent interpretive services while on Public Health Nurse home visits. She is always willing to go the extra mile to assist with various needs of the patients and she displays kindness and gentleness. She is a valuable employee and her work is greatly appreciated.

— Nominated by Carolyn Lovejoy

Bill Cerri and Allen Blankenship

Carpenters
General Services Department

For their extended labor of love in designing proper replacement boards for 40 bunk beds at Discovery House in Martinez. They completely repaired the beds so that they looked brand new and were sturdy enough to enable male clients to get a good night's rest.

— Nominated by Bob Kajdan

Dr. Ravjeet K. Kular

**Dr. Julie Freedman and
ICU Staff**
CCRMC

For their outstanding job in caring for a CCHS employee with clear explanation of all procedures and making the family as comfortable as possible, allowing friends and family to pay their last respects.

— Nominated by Joe Doser

Benjamin Shaver

Information Systems Programmer/Analyst III
Information Systems

Steve Dinning

Health Services Information Tech Supervisor
Information Systems

For an excellent job developing the Access database for the Promoting Smoke-Free Families project. They met a very tight deadline and always demonstrated patience and friendly responsiveness.

— Nominated by Elizabeth Payne

Carla Contestable, RN

Richmond Health Center

For being extremely knowledgeable about all RHC policies and doing follow-up with the highest regard for patients.

— Nominated by Sue Meltzer

Employee Milestones

Congratulations to these employees who have given us long years of service: Donna R. Poirier, Tracy H. Finuf, Jalilah N. Wallace, David J. Jaskolski, Stephanie Y. McDowell, Lakisha Beverly, Luz M. Perez, Scott R. Faivre (10 years); Michael Puell, Margaret S. Ewing (15 years); Kimberly J. Duir, Susan C. Guest, Patricia M. Keane, Rebekah Leiser, Brenda S. Muhareb, Alicia Castillo, Marilyn Scroggins, Kenneth A. Saffier, David P. Hearst, Carla Lindh, Jan Diamond, Jean Rich, Susan J. Vincent, Maria Linda Wenneker (20 years); Adrienne L. Karki, Leo J. Sacauskas, Claudia L. Dillon and Curtis C. Jackson (25 years).

Do you know someone who's going the extra mile?

To recognize a CCHS employee, vendor or volunteer for outstanding Service Excellence performance, submit the "Going the Extra Mile" commendation form, available from every CCHS Division Director, or email your commendation to ServicEX@hsd.co.contra-costa.ca.us or fax it to 925-313-6219. The form can also be downloaded from the Internet (About Us page) or iSite, our Intranet.



Reducing Health Disparities

Cutting Edge Training for CCHP

This fall, Contra Costa Health Plan (CCHP) employees, under the leadership of Patricia Tanquary, Chief Executive Officer, will participate in cutting-edge Cultural Humility training designed to give staff a better understanding of the increasingly diverse populations of Contra Costa County. The training is an innovative course based on the latest research on diverse populations and their problems in relating to health care providers, and it features real video case studies. In addition to web-based training, the training will include classes using role-play led by Wendy Mailer, Tracy Jones and Otilia Tiutin and a panel of speakers including CCHS Director Dr. William Walker, RHD Co-Leader Jose Martin, Personnel Analyst Fran Trant and Chuck McKetney, Manager of our Community Health Assessment, Planning and Evaluation Unit.

The Cultural Humility training is the latest component in CCHP's commitment to reducing health disparities and educating staff about the diversity in cultures and belief systems around them. In 2006, more than 120 CCHP employees were trained in Culturally Competent Customer Service, a curriculum developed by Jeanne Walker Johnson, Education/Training Specialist at CCRMC, and facilitated by Mailer, Jones and Tiutin. Staff gave that effort a 93% favorable evaluation. CCHP's Staff Satisfaction and Retention Committee also highlights different cultures and observances monthly on a bulletin board that all staff and the public can view.



For more information, contact Otilia Tiutin at 313-6063.



From left, Tracy Jones, Patricia Tanquary, Otilia Tiutin and Wendy Mailer worked on conducting Cultural Humility training at CCHP.

Dr. Walker to Meet with Divisions

Several weeks ago, CCHS Director Dr. William Walker met with Contra Costa Health Plan staff to talk about our commitment to reducing health disparities. This meeting was the first of a series of meetings Dr. Walker plans to have with each division to roll out the "Overview of the Five-Year Plan for Reducing Health and Health Care Disparities 2007 - 2012" and the "Year-One Plan 2007 - 08." Key to the effort is a focus on Divisions developing their own unique strategies. To arrange a briefing with Dr. Walker, call Michele Garbers at 925-957-5410 or email mgarbers@hsd.cccounty.us

High Marks for Diversity

The Board of Supervisors recognized us last month as one of only two county departments (the other was Employment and Human Services) that met or exceeded the goal of racial/ethnic diversity and representation of women in its workforce composition. Diversity of staff at service and management levels is an important outcome in our Five-Year RHD plan.

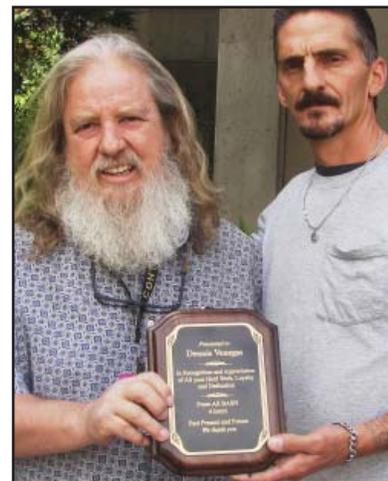
Environmental Health Hosts 'Cal Code' Workshop

Our Environmental Health Division (EH) recently hosted a workshop for representatives of 41 Licensed Health Care Facilities (LHCF) in Contra Costa County. These LHCFs have food operations that are now to be permitted and inspected by EH in accordance with the new state law for retail food facilities called "Cal Code." During the event, it was emphasized repeatedly that since LHCFs have not been inspected and permitted under the regulatory requirements of EH for more than 20 years, a transition period for phased-in compliance was planned, except for defects in operations and facilities that may pose an imminent health hazard to clients and staff of LHCFs. Future workshops will address matters that will inevitably demand EH attention as the standards of Cal Code are implemented at LHCFs. The workshop was arranged by Diana Kato, Supervising Environmental Health Specialist, with lots of help from Martin Sum, Senior Environmental Health Specialist, and Lela Jones, Senior Clerk.

Dennis Venegas Recognized for Service to Parolees

Dennis Venegas, a longtime alcohol and drug abuse counselor for CCHS at the County Jail, was recognized recently for his many years of service to parolees recovering from addiction. At the 15th annual weekend campout and retreat for the Bay Area Service Network, the BASN Alumni Association presented Dennis with a plaque for his service. More than 150 recovering men and women and their families were at the annual event, which Dennis said is paid for by car wash fundraisers. "They caught me totally off-guard," he said of the campfire presentation during the June 21-24 retreat at Lake Berryessa in Napa County.

Dennis Venegas, Alcohol and Other Drugs Services counselor (left), received a plaque at the annual retreat from Tracy Hill, chairman of the Bay Area Service Network Alumni Association.



Dr. Kenneth Saffier

CCRMC Physician the Lead Author of Chronic Pain Article

Dr. Kenneth Saffier, a family physician at Concord Health Center, recently was lead author of "Addiction Severity Index in a Chronic Pain Sample Receiving Opioid Therapy," published online by the Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment. Dr. Saffier was a member of a University of Wisconsin research team while working on the article. The treatment of chronic pain with opioids — a chemical substance with morphine like action in the body — remains controversial, according to the article. Physicians are concerned about addiction and drug diversion, and there is limited empirical information on the use of opioids in patients with chronic pain. The article presents data on the Addiction Severity Index collected in a sample of 908 patients receiving opioids from 235 primary care physicians in Wisconsin. The article concludes, "Chronic pain is not a benign condition.... Primary care patients with chronic pain who are on opioid therapy have high rates of disability, a one-in-five lifetime history of suicide attempts, legal problems, family problems, and psychiatric disorders. From a physician's perspective, they are also one of the most difficult types of patients encountered and often take up an enormous amount of time.

Identification and treatment of ... (other) conditions identified by the ASI could potentially make a significant difference in the care of these patients." Dr. Saffier says he looks forward to participating in additional research projects locally and in our UC Davis affiliated family medicine residency network.



*An abstract of the article is available online at pubmed.gov by searching for *Addiction Severity Index*.*

Healthy Outlook Column Covers Shoulder Pain

CCHS' Dr. Stephen Daniels writes about how to treat shoulder pain in a recent installment of our "Healthy Outlook" column, which runs in the Contra Costa Newspapers chain. In Dr. Daniels' experience, shoulder tendonitis (inflamed tendon) is the most common cause of shoulder pain, although arthritis and a rotator cuff tear may also be involved. Often it takes an MRI to determine the cause. Most shoulder pain can be treated without surgery though physical therapy and medication. Dr. Daniels describes a useful stretching exercise in his column. Also effective are anti-inflammatory medicines, such as Motrin, Advil, Aleve and others available by prescription. For pain lasting for a month or more, a cortisone injection directly into the joint or around the tendon can be most helpful. Sometimes periodic or regular use of narcotic pain relievers (codeine, Vicodin, Norco) may be needed. Shoulder pain that persists despite these treatments may need surgery.



To read more of this and other Healthy Outlook columns, visit cchealth.org and click on the Healthy Outlook link in Items of Interest or on the Publications page.

Project Homeless Connect Looking for Volunteers

More than 260 volunteers turned out last December for the first ever Project Homeless Connect held in Richmond by our Homeless Program. At that event more than 500 homeless members of the community were provided with a range of important services. Now the Homeless Program is planning Project Homeless Connect 2, scheduled October 16 at the Willow Pass Community Center in Concord. For that one day, volunteers will help homeless Contra Costa residents connect to benefits, medical care, substance abuse and mental health counseling, housing, etc. Some employees will be working the event as part of their regular assignments. Others are needed as greeters and to serve food, complete applications and more. County Administrator John Cullen is encouraging interested county employees, with the approval of their supervisors, to use their leave to volunteer for this very worthwhile event or to contribute financial support.



More information and a volunteer application is available on our website at cchealth.org



Andrienne Appel, center, was honored upon her retirement by a proclamation from the Board of Supervisors and joined by her Alcohol and Other Drugs Services coworkers Haven Fearn, far left, and Amalia DelValle, far right.

Long Time AOD Staffer Retires

Alcohol and Other Drugs Services Division's Adrienne Appel, who retires next month, was recognized by the Board of Supervisors recently for 35 years of service to Health Services and the County. Haven Fearn, AOD Director, called her the "very embodiment of public service." Currently the supervisor of AOD's Perinatal program, Adrienne performed a range of functions, from running the County's DUI program to supervising men in residential recovery. She played a key role in relocating Discovery House to its present location. Acknowledging the Board resolution, Adrienne said it was "a real privilege and honor to work for Contra Costa."

Patient Navigator Program Awarded Money from Avon Foundation Fundraiser

At last month's fifth annual Avon Walk for Breast Cancer San Francisco, the Avon Foundation's Executive Director Carol Kurzig announced a \$200,000 grant to continue support for our Patient Navigator Program and case management services for low-income, uninsured, underserved women, with special emphasis on African American women, Spanish-speaking and other non-English speaking women. These funds will help to increase the number of women obtaining breast health services by 500; increase the number of women navigated by 5%; and reduce the time between breast cancer diagnosis and the start of treatment from two months to one month.



From left, Sue Guest, Gilma Molina and Sandy Gregory with daughter Catherine, and accept the award from Avon Executive Director Carol Kurzig, second from left, at the closing ceremonies of the San Francisco Avon Walk.

This Year's Combined Charity Drive Dubbed 'A Helping Hand'

The theme for the 2007 Combined Charity Drive is "A Helping Hand." Helping hands are necessary in creating and continuing vibrant communities. "I ask that you consider making a contribution to the charity of your choice," said John Cullen, County Administrator, in a recent email address to county employees. "I realize that many of you contribute privately to charities throughout the year but please consider lending a helping hand. We can have a greater impact if we are united as a working community." Employees will be given information by the department coordinator of the campaign and on iSITE following its rollout October 1. This year's campaign is dedicated to Fire Captain Matt Burton and Fire Engineer Scott Desmond, who died in the line of duty on July 21. It includes a drawing for a one-week trip to Maui and other gifts. Employees get one drawing ticket for every \$250 they donate annually up to \$1,000. Contributions can be made on a monthly basis or a one-time donation. Ron Harvey, County Risk Manager, and Joe Valentine, Director of Employment and Human Services, are the chair and vice chair respectively of the 2007 campaign. Several of the charities in the program are county-run agencies, such as the George Miller Center parent groups, Meals on Wheels of Contra Costa and the CCRMC Auxiliary.