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Cover the Uninsured

Every year at this time, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the leading national funder of innovative health care programs, sponsors Cover the Uninsured Week. During May 1-7, thousands of activities will take place in all 50 states and the District of Columbia to tell Congress that health coverage for Americans must be their top priority. This year's observation comes at a time when 46 million Americans have no health coverage – and that number continues to grow as employers across the country are cutting back or eliminating worker coverage.

An employment-based model

The health insurance system in this country is an employment-based model where people lose their coverage for health care if they leave employment or if their employer eliminates coverage. Some people never obtain coverage again. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, today only 61.9% of working people get coverage through their employers, down from 71% in 1987. Big companies like General Motors and Ford have said recently that they can't afford to compete internationally unless the amount they pay for healthcare coverage for their employees is reduced.

You can trace this employment-based model back to World War II when there were wage freezes and companies offered health benefits instead. President Harry Truman was a voice in the wilderness for national health insurance – it never happened. In the '80s, no one discussed it. In the '90s, the Clinton plan failed to gain the support it needed.

Now, we are seeing the same scenario being played out for retiree healthcare benefits. The elimination or reduction of retiree benefits will have a huge impact on the growing population of seniors. Many of the plans in place now have supplemented Medicare or provided additional benefits. It will mean more out-of-pocket expenses for seniors on fixed incomes.

More cutbacks in the works

You'll probably hear about the health insurance issue in the coming months. It's an

election year. Despite the increased discussion, there are no significant efforts to increase health insurance for large numbers of people. In fact, efforts are underway by the Bush Administration to reduce government spending on Medicare and Medicaid.

That may have happened by the time you read this. The impact on our bottom line is potentially staggering because federal Medicaid funds provide the largest amount of revenue to systems like ours. As the largest safety net provider in the county for both the uninsured and underinsured, federal reductions could have profound effects on our patients.

This is not new problem and I've written about it here a number of times before.

When General Motors talks

My own feeling is that when the health care crisis impacts the middle class – the voting population of the country, the people who live in suburban communities – change will happen. When big business, like the car manufacturers, say they need help and imply they want the government to step in, we may actually see the reform we need so badly. We might move toward a system of national insurance. Even the American Medical Association, which once opposed what it called "socialized medicine," now concedes something must be done.

Continued next page



— Dr. Walker

DID YOU KNOW

Last year our Financial Counselors answered **210,534** calls from patients and staff, approved **14,152** applications for Basic Health Care and assisted **2,000** families with Medi-Cal and Healthy Families applications.

Our model system

In the meantime, here in Contra Costa we've created an extraordinary system focused on access to care and health insurance. We've combined revenues from federal, state and local sources, including Medicare and Medicaid, with employer-based insurance through our Contra Costa Health Plan. To provide care for a large portion of the uninsured, we have a system of access including primary and most specialty care in our health centers, and hospitalization in our medical center with some specialty services through contracts. We've been able to coordinate the efforts of many county agencies through the Health Access Coalition, which focuses on letting residents and agency staff know what coverage is available and how to get care.

We've continued to provide a safety net of services despite our budget woes because of the commitment of the Board of Supervisors. In spite of the significant budget cuts we are facing this year, we are not reducing access to outpatient or inpatient care. County funds, while less than 15% of our total budget, make an important contribution to continuing access for all our patients.

To make that possible, we require all individuals who use our system to pursue their eligibility for insurance that does exist, primarily MediCal for low-income residents and Healthy Families for children. To support this, we instituted upfront financial counseling several years ago. New patients without insurance get help by phone from our financial counselors immediately upon entering our system. This approach has increased our revenue and made it possible for us to continue to fulfill our mission.

Lorena Martinez-Ochoa, who staffs the Health Access Coalition, says up front financial counseling helps us connect people with coverage, helps them apply and forges a partnership among county agencies serving the public. She points out that as much as we are already doing, we can do more. Anyone who has contact with the public has responsibility to find out if they have insurance and help connect them with our financial counselors (phone 800-771-4270).

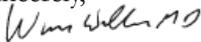
Equal care

As a provider in our system it is interesting to me that over the years, coverage identifiers in patients' records – CCHP, MediCal, Basic Health Care – are there, but are generally invisible to me in my practice. Fully covered people get care side by side with those who obtain access through Basic Health Care. We've created an egalitarian and high quality system. This could be a national model for the best use of dollars. The money spent on premiums is cycled back into health care instead of corporate profits.

I am the first to admit that the unique system we have built cannot work everywhere. Counties with fewer resources and larger populations of uninsured have an almost impossible task facing them. People who live in those counties and have no insurance are at grave risk.

I don't want to mince words about this. Not having a system that provides access to health care for all is a national scandal. We will never have equity in health care and meet the needs of our residents until we pledge that health care is a right for all rather than a privilege for some.

Sincerely,



William Walker, MD

Calling All Artists

Whether you're a painter, musician, photographer, quilter or otherwise talented, share your art with other CCHS employees at a special event to be held at 5:30 p.m. July 13 at Contra Costa Regional Medical Center (CCRMC). Titled "Healthcare Workers as Creators: An Evening of Art on the Courtyard," the event is part of the ArtsChange program that has been organizing visual art and education programs at our Richmond Health Center (RHC) since 1997. Physician Paul Sarvasy, who divides his time between RHC and CCRMC, came up with the idea for the event as a first step in expanding the ArtsChange program to Martinez. ArtsChange is a nonprofit arts organization formerly called the Quilt of Many Colors. The CCRMC event will take place outside on the lawn.

 Artists and musicians who are interested in participating – or anyone interested in volunteering to help out at the event – can email Dr. Paul Sarvasy at psarvasy@sbcglobal.net or leave a message for him at 925-370-5200, ext. 3476.

The Director's Report is published monthly. Deadline for the June edition is May 8. Publicize your upcoming events and successes by sending information to Julie Freestone at 597 Center Avenue, Suite 255, Martinez 94553, fax 925-313-6219, email: jfreestone@hds.co.contra-costa.ca.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

Esther Gutierrez

*Community Health Worker
Public Health Clinic Services*

For providing high quality care in a courteous, professional and caring way, being reliable, cooperative and genuinely interested in patients, and giving additional assistance to patients to connect them with outside support.

—Nominated by Barbara Griesau and Sandy Gregory

Pat Hill, FNP

*Health on Wheels
Health Care for the Homeless*

For helping to restore dignity and quality of life to a homeless person by making referrals, including to the Richmond Senior Housing Program for the disabled.

—Nominated by Kerry Butler

David Krattli

*Administrative Support Staff
Community Wellness & Prevention Program*

For being responsive, diligent and efficient in his work, giving every assignment special attention and completing assignments on time and with quality. His approach is “no worries.”

—Nominated by the Public Health Outreach Education and Collaborations Unit

Chinyere Madawaki

*Manager
Center for Health, North Richmond*

For going the extra mile for staff, patients and the community.

—Nominated by Patricia Vigil

Gaby Martinez

*Community Health Worker
Public Health Clinic Services*

For helping a patient diagnosed with breast cancer by starting a fund and enlisting other county employees to help the patient and her family through the holidays.

—Nominated by Sandy Gregory

Rosemary Sandoval

*Supervisor
Central Appointments*

For finding a way to schedule an emergency appointment and resolving a Medicare problem for two physically challenged patients. She was the light at the end of the tunnel.

—Nominated by Nancy Kouzak, Independent Living Resource of Contra Costa County

Thongphet Sivilay

*Entry Level Clerk
Richmond Health Center*

For a positive attitude, professionalism and willingness to go the extra mile in a very busy office.

—Nominated by Richmond WIC staff

John Sturr

*Medical Social Worker
AIDS Program*

For his responsiveness to clients and colleagues, vast knowledge of resources and systems, and willingness to tackle thorny problems. He knows how to make the people he works with feel valued and he leads by example, always providing outstanding service.

—Nominated by Michelle Cataldo

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 ServiceEX@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.

Employee Milestones

Congratulations to these employees who have given us long years of service: Sherman Quinlan Jr., Oscar F. Monta, William B. Jurewicz, Lynda Minor, Theresa A. Draper, Karen S. Wright, Faalua Iosua (10 years); Rita Barouch, Redempta B. Tumbaga, Robin Bedell Waite, Theresa D. Doakes, Tokozani V. Kumalo (15 years); Deborah L. Shiles, Denise K. Root (20 years); Debra E. Ferrara and Karen E. Soliz (25 years). *We know there are lots of other dedicated employees with long years of service. Because of space limitations, we are only reporting those with 10, 15, 20, and 25.*

This page brings news of how the implementation of the CCHS Plan for Reducing Health Disparities is progressing. Our divisions have been working on three key areas: improving linguistic access, implementing educational activities on diversity and cultural and linguistic competence, and developing an organizational climate that values patient, customer and employee diversity.

Obesity: An Epidemic, A Health Disparity



Sally McFalone, Diane Dooley and Annabelle Cadiz (from left to right)

This month's health disparity topic is obesity. African Americans and Latinos living in Contra Costa County are most at risk for being extremely overweight or obese compared to the county population as a whole. (See our *Community Health Indicators for Selected Cities and Places in Contra Costa* available online at cchealth.org by clicking on Health Data.)

Obesity is a serious health problem for both adults and children. Childhood obesity is on the rise, and nearly half the children who are overweight remain overweight as adults, said Dr. Diane Dooley, a Contra Costa Health Plan pediatrician who practices at the Concord Health Center and also chairs the pediatrics department at Contra Costa Regional Medical Center (CCRMC).

"Obesity is an epidemic among adults and children. In Contra Costa, more than 40% of the children who had well checks at our clinics were overweight or at risk of being overweight," Dr. Dooley said.

Before this epidemic was recognized, there wasn't a consistent system of identifying overweight children. Physicians were unsure how to sensitively discuss this problem with families and assist them in adopting healthier lifestyles. Nutritionist Annabelle Cadiz with Public Health's Child Health and Disability Prevention program developed an innovative training for calculating body mass index (BMI) for children and shared it with nurses and doctors throughout our health system. An interdivisional pediatric obesity committee developed a tool kit, "Have Fun and Be Healthy."

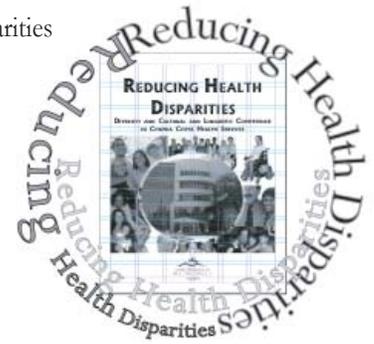
Using a \$50,000 grant from the California Healthcare Foundation, Annabelle, Dr. Dooley and Sally McFalone, a Public Health Program Specialist with Public Health Clinic Services, trained more than 300 doctors, nurses and other health care staff last year on how to use the tool kit.

To complement clinical interventions, other strategies are needed as part of a comprehensive approach to today's obesity epidemic. Our Bay Point Family Health Center has engaged the community with its Promotoras program, which enlists Spanish community members to provide classes in Spanish about healthy eating, reducing TV time, and other topics. Public Health's Community Wellness & Prevention Program (CW&PP) is focusing its intervention efforts on ensuring that county residents have knowledge about and access to healthy foods and physical activity. Examples of CW&PP's efforts include making streets safer so kids can exercise, providing fresh produce to residents in Richmond, and making sure that vending machines on county premises have healthy choices. Partnerships with community-based agencies support local obesity prevention efforts.

The Family and Maternal and Child Health Program's TeenAge Program work with middle school students to promote healthy eating in their schools. And the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) supplemental nutrition program educates families about healthy eating and provides support to low-income women to breastfeed their infants.



Send feedback about this story or the RHDI page to Kate Fowlie via e-mail kfowlie@hsd.cccounty.us or by calling 925-313-6832. A longer version of this story is available in the Director's Report online at cchealth.org or on the Intranet.



NEW Kids Program Helps Fight Childhood Obesity in Pittsburg

Many parents of overweight children don't believe their children have a weight problem but they are willing to enroll in classes about healthy lifestyles. Our NEW (Nutrition, Exercise and Wellness) Kids program at Pittsburg Health Center is taking advantage of this by promoting healthy lifestyles instead of weight loss to help families prevent and deal with childhood obesity, said Public Health Program Manager Susan Nairn. The pediatric weight management program is for youth ages 6 to 14 and available in both Spanish and English. The program includes clinical services at the Health Center and community-based prevention programs with after school classes at Stoneman and Heights elementary schools and through the Promotoras program. Health care providers refer significantly overweight children to weight management sessions at the Health Center, which include nutritional guidance, behavior modification techniques, active games and more. The after-school and Promotoras components include classes on topics such as how to eat healthy at home and dining out. Each class also features a fun physical activity like soccer or salsa dancing. The focus is not on weight loss, but the children do lose weight. The program is a collaboration of Public Health's Community Wellness & Prevention Program and Clinical Services, Los Medanos Health Care District Board, Mt. Diablo Region YMCA and the Pittsburg Unified School District.

For more information on NEW Kids, contact Susan Nairn at snairn@hsd.cccounty.us or 925-313-6278.

Medical Center Recognizes National Volunteer Week

Contra Costa Regional Medical Center celebrated National Volunteer Week on April 26 with a recognition event saluting its volunteers. CCRMC's 45 current volunteers put in 11,758 hours last year. When the value of the volunteers' hours is added to the \$19,303 worth of in-kind donations such as layettes and toys, plus \$9,827 in donations and \$6,333 in fund-raising, you get a volunteer contribution of \$247,577! And that doesn't even include \$74,881 in purchases made by the CCRMC Auxillary. It's clear that our ability to serve clients at CCRMC is greatly increased by our wonderful volunteers, supervised by Louise Lawson, Volunteer Services Coordinator.



Auxillary volunteers Olga Bier and Theo Pistochin helped sell Easter flowers and toys.



For more information or to help, contact Louise Lawson at llawson@bsd.cccounty.us or 925-370-5440.

Regional Health Foundation Update Plans Gala, Advisory Group

The Contra Costa Regional Health Foundation (CCRHF), which supports our Regional Medical Center and Health Centers, has several efforts underway to bolster its fundraising efforts. Its 3rd Annual Gala Event is scheduled for Saturday, September 23. "Jazz on the Boulevard," to be held at the new Lafayette War Veterans Memorial Building, will feature silent and live auctions, food catered by Blake's at Boundary Oaks, beverages and jazz entertainment. CCRHF's employee giving program, Caring Employees Fund, which the Foundation Board Members and Hospital and Health Center staff have been working on for several months, will be launched sometime in the next month or so. And the Foundation's Board of Directors has decided to establish an Advisory Group of key members of the business, health, education and law communities in Contra Costa County. The Advisory Group will be used as a sounding board to discuss fundraising strategies, board development and recruitment of new board members. A fundraising professional is working with the board to conduct interviews and other assessment efforts that will result in a two-to-five year strategic plan.



For more information, call CCRHF Chief Executive Officer Frank Puglisi at 925-957-5424.

Group Has Goal of Coordinating School-Based Health Services

Our TeenAge (TAP) Program is part of a new group of agencies and organizations in Contra Costa that are banding together to improve the local system of school-based health services. "Many different agencies are providing school-linked and school-based health services in Contra Costa," said Ahna Suleiman, Manager of the TAP program. "Working together, we can maximize our resources, share lessons learned, and expand and improve school-based health services." Others invited to participate so far include the school board and school nurse from West Contra Costa Unified School District; community groups like New Connections, Planned Parenthood and Asian Pacific Psychological Services; and agencies providing school-based services at several high schools and a middle school. Contra Costa was one of five communities statewide selected by the California School Health Centers Association (CSHCA, schoolhealthcenters.org) to work on this topic with three years of funding by The California Endowment. The new countywide group had its first meeting March 28 in Martinez and is still seeking more partners who provide school-based mental, dental, physical or reproductive health services.



For more information, contact Ahna Suleiman at asuleiman@bsd.cccounty.org or 925-313-6189.

CCHP Has New Pharmacy Provider

Beginning this month, Contra Costa Health Plan's (CCHP) more than 65,000 members will have an expanded full-service pharmacy program. PerformRx, AmeriHealth Mercy's pharmacy benefit management (PBM) division, was chosen to administer the program because of their superior customer service record, expanded network, which includes Walgreen's, and the potential for cost savings and better financial reporting. CCHP's Planning Director Tess O'Riva says Perform Rx is very familiar with Medicare Part D and has a full-service customer care center that will be able to handle a wider variety of questions about drug coverage. PerformRx will also enforce contract provisions that ask members to use a generic substitute and that educate providers about the less-costly drug alternatives and step therapy. The Health Plan's Pharmacy Director, Adeebah Fakurnejad, spearheaded the transition to PerformRx, while Deputy Executive Director Patricia Tanquary coordinated contract negotiations. CCHP's Judi Louro worked out the operational details like customer service, appeals and new ID cards. Information Service's Art Webb and Mike Anderson helped get Perform Rx all the information they needed to make the transition work. PerformRx should be a much better system for CCHP members and that is always a good thing.



For more information call Judi Louro at 925-957-7251.



Randy Sanyer and Tony Semenza of CAER (Community Awareness and Emergency Response), center from left, lunch in Martinez with environmental protection officials from China.

The group of local and national officials were visiting in the wake of a serious industrial accident in China. They heard several presentations at the EOC including one on accident prevention by Mike Dossey, Accidental Release Prevention Engineer, and one by Maria Duazo, Hazardous Materials Specialist II, who also led a tour of our Hazardous Materials Response van. The presentations demonstrated how “cutting edge” our county has become in terms of emergency preparedness and industrial safety.



For more information about accidental release prevention in Contra Costa, visit our website at cchealth.org and click on Hazardous Materials Programs or call that Division at 646-2286.

Six Retire After Long Service to the County

All good careers must come to an end, and so it is that we are saying goodbye this season to six of our longtime staff: Paula Hines, Deputy Director of the Child Health & Disability Program, who was first hired for a nursing position in 1970; Dale Jenssen, Program Manager of Public Health Nursing for the last 10 of her 20 years with us; Steve Loveseth, Program Manager with Alcohol & Other Drugs Services (AODS) who was hired in 1990; George Khoury, an Accountant in Health Services Finance who was hired in 1991; George Nakamura, a Supervising Environmental Health Specialist who was hired in 1991; and Fran Newgard, a Senior Level Clerk, first for Mental Health and then AODS, since 1996. Several of them are making travel plans, including a trip to Italy and Greece for Fran and the East Coast and then Asia for Dale. Paula is planning to incorporate travel with work on medical services abroad and also South American wine importing. Good luck to all of you, and to any other recent retirees we may have missed. Thank You for the many years of Service Excellence.



To report retirements of longtime employees to the Director's Report editors, contact Dan Smith at dsmith@hsd.cccounty.us or 925-313-6833.

Health Emergency Response Team Holds SNS Tabletop

Our Health Emergency Response Team held a Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) warehouse tabletop exercise last month to test our county's ability to receive, stage and store federal medical supplies during an emergency. More than 30 representatives from CCHS, General Services, Public Works, the Office of Emergency Services, County Sheriff, police and other local agencies attended the two-hour event. Public Health Director Wendel Brunner, MD, and Communicable Disease Program Chief Francie Wise were among the participants, along with Health Emergency Response Coordinator Kim Cox and Health Emergency Response Team members Gerald Tamayo and Donna Mann, who designed the exercise. The tabletop was in preparation for a statewide drill that we'll participate in this month. Managed by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the SNS provides vaccines and other needed medical supplies during large-scale health emergencies such as disease outbreaks, earthquakes and bioterrorism attacks.



State DHS Emergency Preparedness Project Officer Ted Selby (at left) and CCHS Health Emergency Response Team member Gerald Tamayo chat before last month's Strategic National Stockpile tabletop exercise.



For more information, contact Kim Cox at kcox@hsd.cccounty.us or 925-313-6648.