

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

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Compelling Issues

This month my message focuses on three issues that will be in the forefront of our minds for months if not years. For the next few months, the Board of Supervisors will be working to close a budget gap. Next month, Public Health will stage a tabletop exercise to look at how we would deal with a flu pandemic such as a global avian flu outbreak. And for the next several years at least, we continue to roll out strategies related to our Reducing Health Disparities Initiative.

The Budget

Last month, County Administrator John Sweeten conducted a budget workshop for the Board of Supervisors. He described an anticipated budget shortfall of \$40-50 million resulting from a "misalignment" of revenue and expenditures. The shortfall will impact all county departments because it results from rising compensation costs. For example Workers' Compensation is estimated to increase 41.8%; pension costs by 27.7%; employee health insurance by 12.1% and wages and salaries by 5.8%. Again these figures are for the entire County.

Reductions will have to be made in order to absorb these increases. They will be shared among county departments. Mr. Sweeten outlined nine principles that should be considered by department heads as they identify reductions. The first two principles are to first target discretionary programs, then mandated programs with discretionary service levels. (Read the nine principles on the CCHS Intranet.) In its discussion, the Board of Supervisors indicated that some departments may have to absorb more reductions than others.

The Board talked extensively about Mr. Sweeten's presentation, acknowledging that it was "a starting point" fraught with unknowns, including the State budget situation. "It comes down to our values and priorities," said Supervisor John Gioia. Supervisor Mark DeSaulnier recalled that when he was first elected to the Board 10 years ago, he thought

that he could "clean up" some of the problems and streamline operations. "Now I realize we don't have the discretion," he said, pointing to state and federal mandates that often dictate program activities and funding.

He and other Board members talked about the need to balance funding for prevention programs against other services. He described a situation where bodies were washing down a river and finally people realized they had to go upstream to see why people were dying and falling into the river.

Supervisor Gail B. Uilkema said that she understood that asking department heads to come up with suggestions for reductions was "like asking them to cut off their own arms and legs," but she and others stressed the need for advice from departments. Another Board member called the discussion "a legitimate public debate about what to cut."

I am pleased that the Board is starting early this year so we can have that debate, beginning with public hearings in April. The Board asked us to be prepared to explain how we develop our reduction recommendations and I intend to do that so they can have a complete understanding of our rationale and the impact of cuts. Then there will be time before June to make



— Dr. Walker

Continued next page

DID YOU KNOW

Financial Counselors for our
health centers handle calls from
850 to 950 people daily

New on Our Website: cchealth.org

If you're a frequent visitor to our public website <http://cchealth.org>, you know that there's always something new posted on it. Thanks to the California Healthcare Foundation's California Healthline, you can now get the three top health news stories from a syndicated feature on our site. We've also reorganized the publications page (find it from the home page) to include newsletters, reports, articles, guidebooks, press releases and case studies. You may be surprised at how many there are!

 Send comments or suggestions about the website to Julie Freestone at jfreestone@hsd.co.contra-costa.ca.us or fax 925-313-6219.

Director's Message Continued...

choices. (See our Intranet site for the budget schedule.)

Division directors are now looking at strategies such as program redesign, efficiencies and revenue enhancement to meet target reductions identified by the County Administrator.

Preparing for Avian Flu

Health officials around the world have been saying for years that a flu pandemic – an outbreak of infectious disease that affects a large number of people – is inevitable. Dr Julie Gerberding, Director of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, said recently that avian flu may pose the single biggest current health threat to the world, comparable to that experienced in 1918, when Spanish flu resulted in an estimated 50 million deaths. The situation reminds me of other public health epidemics when health providers didn't know the exact cause and nature of a new infection.

This is a new virus, with potential to cause panic. While current concern centers on Southeast Asia, difficulties in vaccine supply and the consequence of any virus mutation mean that the bird flu threat must be urgently addressed on a global level. While human-to-human transmission has occurred, it has been extremely rare. Health officials are worried that the possibility of virus mutation could result in the emergence of a new strain to which humans have limited or no immunity.

Last fall, our Public Health Division conducted a mass flu clinic, vaccinating more than 6,000 residents in one day. But, because there is no vaccine for avian flu, quarantine and other strategies might have to be used. It is appropriate for us to prepare for respiratory viruses, which will allow us to focus on some issues unique to avian flu and also to exercise our normal disaster response with this very real threat in mind.

The tabletop exercise, scheduled for May 2, will address communication issues, surveillance and epidemiologic activities, and isolation and quarantine. I think we are in much better shape than we have been in the past for several reasons: improved technology, the increased expertise of public health labs like ours, the kind of relationships we have with the local medical community and heightened awareness of the need for surveillance — all encouraged and supported by federal bioterrorism funding. The Internet has also provided direct communications with the CDC, the state and other agencies transmitting timely information. I am sure we will learn many lessons during the tabletop about what we need to be prepared for avian flu or other public health crises.

Funding will help our Reducing Health Disparities Initiative

In this issue of the *Director's Report*, you'll read about a new project, LEADing Organizational Change: Advancing Quality through Culturally Responsive Care. I serve on the California Safety Net Institute's advisory committee for this LEAD project. I am proud of the application we made for this important project that will focus on providing prenatal care for Latinas in East County. It will build on significant work already done by our Family, Maternal and Child Health program in this area. The involvement of Dr. Jeff Smith and other high level staff represents the commitment of senior leaders to our Reducing Health Disparities Initiative.

The power of the project is that it should develop approaches to profound organizational change that can be applied to other programs and in other parts of the county. The grant also provides resources to further our ongoing Reducing Health Disparities Initiative work.

Sincerely, 

William Walker, M.D.

The Director's Report is published monthly. Deadline for the May edition is April 13. 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@hsd.co.contra-costa.ca.us. The Director's Report is available online at cchealth.org and on the Intranet at cchs.

GOING THE EXTRA MILE FOR SERVICE EXCELLENCE

Honor Roll

Shawn Eyer and Shizuko Angel
Web Producer and Web Designer

For the many hours of painstaking work they did to redesign the website, making it faster and more navigable and resulting in more than 40,000 visits to it each month.

—Nominated by William Walker, MD

Melody Hung-Fan and Laboratory Staff

For their teamwork approach to delivering rapid HIV testing services in the community. The technical advice, sharing of resources, review of procedures, proficiency testing of staff, and responsiveness have been key to our success.

—Nominated by Carla Goad

Don Spaugy
AODS Manager

For continuously going out of his way during the shutdown of the DUI schools to mitigate problems of transfer for clients, steer them to complete their obligations to the State and ensure that CCHS meets its obligations to clients. He best exemplifies what is good about civil service.

—Nominated by Leslie Klinger

Maxima Warrell, RN

For her attentiveness, cheerfulness, deep insight and vast knowledge. "Our stay in this hospital was certainly made a lot easier while she was on duty."

—Nominated by a patient

Home Visitor Honored

Blue Cross of California last month recognized Haydee Marien, Home Visitor for the Prenatal Care Guidance Program in our Family, Maternal and Child Health program, for making a difference in the lives of children and families in their communities. Haydee, who works in East Contra Costa County, was among five individuals in Alameda and Contra Costa counties who were honored, along with 18 community programs including Welcome Home Baby. You can see Haydee's photo on the cchs Intranet.

People Who Make a Difference Awards

The Alcohol and Other Drugs Advisory Board is seeking nominations for its annual "People Who Make a Difference" awards. There are six award categories: Volunteer Individual, Volunteer Group, Non-Volunteer Individual, Non-Volunteer Group, Youth Leadership Individual and Youth Leadership Group. The deadline is April 18. Award recipients will be acknowledged by the Board of Supervisors on May 17.



Applications and more information are available online at <http://cchealth.org> or on the CCHS intranet at cchs. For more information call Fatima Matal Sol at 925-313-6311.

Employee Milestones

Congratulations to these employees who have given us long years of service: Laura Easley, Bobbie Thomas, Pedro Martinez, Marcia Furtado, Edna Riwkes, Ofelia Dimas, Enriqueta Gomez, Maria Padilla, Lori Carone, Betty Carpiso, Lucy Rodriguez (10 years); Kwame Mugodo, Julia Dempsey, Carolyn Galitzen, Joan Loor, Tommy Nunnally, Maria Ruiz Casillas, Deborah Cho, Jacqueline Pigg, Juanita Brand-Lawson, Charles Nicholson, E Jaye Anderson (15); William Hoyt, Elizabeth Vargas, Shoya Warrington (20); Steven Shelton, Martha Perry, Alan Abreu, Sheree Howe (25). (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, 25 and 30 years.)

This page brings news of how the implementation of the CCHS Plan for Reducing Health Disparities is progressing and highlights program efforts. Our divisions have been working on three key areas to reduce health disparities. These are 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.



“Customer service and cultural sensitivity are closely linked.”

—Wanda Session, CCHS Patient Financial Counseling Manager

Cultural Competence Training Pays Off for Financial Counseling Unit

Our Financial Counseling unit has reduced complaints and improved service for clients seeking care at our Health Centers thanks to cultural competence training conducted recently. Wanda Session, Patient Financial Counseling Unit Manager, noticed there were communication issues related to cultural differences faced by our financial counselors. Financial Counselors help patients seeking health care at our facilities enroll in appropriate health insurance coverage programs and ensure the county gets reimbursed through the correct channels. The counselors already use our telephone interpreter service, but sometimes *how* something was said was more of an issue than what



Left to right; Leslie Lonergan, Jeanne Walker-Johnson, RN, Wanda Session and Pat Godley, Chief Financial Officer.

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More Reducing Health Disparities News!

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actually was said. For example, in some cultures, the male head of the household is the one who represents the family and speaks for his wife. This created a conflict because confidentiality policies restrict with whom the financial counselors can discuss patient information. Wanda worked with Jeanne Walker-Johnson, RN, CCRMC Education and Training

Specialist, and Leslie Lonergan, Patient Financial Counseling Supervisor, to develop a series of training sessions, which finished in February. The training presented the counselors with information on cultural differences and gave them concrete tools to communicate more effectively, such as listening and defusing techniques. The increased cultural awareness has helped give counselors more patience and an increased ability to appropriately frame explanations of policies, such as that a patient must give consent before the counselor can discuss the case with the patient’s husband. Wanda is pleased with the positive response from the counselors and the fact that the number of client complaints has dropped off significantly. “We asked our counselors to take a look at themselves and their belief systems and how those beliefs affect how we relate to people of different cultures — and they did,” she said. To help keep up the momentum and motivate employees to encourage each other, counselors also were given cards with candies to present to co-workers when they handle a difficult call especially well.

Employee response was tremendously positive to the recent cultural competence training in the Financial Counseling unit, said Wanda Session, Financial Counseling Unit Manager. In fact, the employees felt the topic was so important they requested the training session be expanded from one hour to 90 minutes. “They felt it was important. They wanted to know more and better understand the different cultural issues,” Wanda said. Many employees wrote positive comments in evaluations of the training:

“This training allowed me to be more knowledgeable about the needs of the community.”

“I learned how to be more sensitive.”

“I have more empathy.”

“We learned to be patient and open-minded.”

“This training brought out the best in all of us.”

“This was a true treasure of training.”

“I learned how to bend not break.”

“We can also use this training in life.”



For more information, call Wanda Session at 925-370-5570 or e-mail her at wsession@hsd.co.contra-costa.ca.us

Mental Health Services Act (Prop. 63) Update

Our Mental Health Division has launched its planning process to implement the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA), Prop. 63. Counties are required to develop and submit three-year plans. The first two of six planning areas are Community Program Planning and Community Services and Supports for four stakeholder groups including children, transition-age youth, adults and older adults. The State Department of Mental Health requires counties to receive input from a wide variety of stakeholders in developing the plan, including consumers, family members, providers of services, social service, education and law enforcement. We're going further, involving our own Divisions, housing programs, foster care programs, agencies that serve monolingual populations, faith-based groups, advocacy organizations and many others. More than 300 attendees participated in orientations for potential stakeholders held in February and March. The four stakeholder groups will meet in April, May and early June to develop priorities for programs and services. The Mental Health Commission also began a series of six community forums last month, giving residents the opportunity to voice their ideas. To get input from unserved and underserved consumers and family members and mental health staff, focus groups and surveys will also be used. Once the plan is drafted, the Commission will begin a 30-day comment period. After it is approved by the Board of Supervisors, the plan will be submitted to the state. We could receive our first funding during the first quarter of 2006. Funds must be used for new services and to expand services and supports without supplanting existing services funded from state and local government. While Prop. 63 funding offers an extraordinary opportunity to better serve our consumers and family members, it is important to remember it represents only a modest 15% increase in the State Health Department's annual budget for mental health services.



For more information, including the schedule of community forums, check our website at <http://cchealth.org> or the state website at <http://www.dmh.cahwnet.gov>.



Kudos to our TB Team

A new report released by our Communicable Disease Unit last month shows how our Tuberculosis (TB) team's hard work in the Richmond/San Pablo area has paid off. There was a 54% decline of Tuberculosis cases in that area last year. The TB team (at left), lead by Dr. Charles Crane, Medical Director for our Tuberculosis Program, formed a local advisory board, West County Communities Against TB. Together they participated in activities to promote community awareness of TB. The Disease Investigation Technicians and nurses worked hard to put together an exceptional response system, and their efforts were rewarded. The incidence of TB in Contra Costa during 2004 was 23% lower than the incidence of TB in California as a whole.



The report, which was developed by Dr. Juan Reardon, can be viewed on our website at cchealth.org. Visit the CCHS Intranet (type *cchs* in the browser address line) to see the names of the TB team.

Needle Pilot Project Progressing

In December, the Board of Supervisors authorized us to develop a demonstration project to implement a new state law allowing pharmacists to sell non-prescription syringes to people. To launch the project, we sent letters to all pharmacists in Contra Costa. Several pharmacies, including some Safeway and Longs Drugs stores and some smaller, privately-owned pharmacies have requested information and applications. Walgreen stores along the I-80 corridor in West Contra Costa are registered to participate in the project, and we are in discussions with Central County Walgreen stores. Rite Aid has submitted an application for their stores countywide. Public Health Director Wendel Brunner, MD will be participating in the State working group that will develop an evaluation of these demonstration projects, and we've received dozens of requests for information from other health departments across the state. The legislation was passed to reduce the transmission of blood-borne diseases such as HIV and Hepatitis C. It supports the United States Public Health Service recommendation that individuals who inject drugs use a new, sterile syringe for each injection.



For more information call Christine Leivermann at 925-313-6771 or check <http://cchealth.org>.

Heroes Abounded

There was no shortage of heroes on the set recently when Contra Costa Television shot a public service announcement for the Promoting Smoke-Free Families project. The production stars a group of young children declaring which family member is "my hero" and why. The punchline is a little girl who says earnestly, "My mom's my hero because she smokes outside." The 30-second PSA was taped in one March afternoon, mostly at Martinez Shoreline Park. A grant from First Five Contra Costa has enabled not only the production of the ad, but also a purchase of time on cable television throughout Contra Costa to air it in May. If you watch MTV, Fox Family or Black Entertainment Television during May, you just may see it. The Promoting Smoke-Free Families Project is a collaborative effort between Family, Maternal and Child Health and the Tobacco Prevention Project in the Community Wellness and Prevention Program.



Contra Costa Television crew work with Health Services staff on videotaping a 30-second PSA.



For more information, contact Denice Dennis at 313-6825.

April 2005 is Alcohol Awareness Month

Our Alcohol and Other Drugs Advisory Board and the Alcohol and Other Drugs Services Division will coordinate several community events to raise awareness about the devastating effects of underage drinking. This year's theme, Together We Can Stop Underage Drinking, underscores the alarming information that alcohol is the number one drug of choice among youth and that drinking is associated with risk-taking behaviors and sensation-seeking behaviors among adolescents. Youth who begin drinking before age 15 or younger are four times more likely to develop problems with alcohol use and dependence than those who begin drinking at age 21. The Board of Supervisors will proclaim April as Alcohol Awareness Month and alcohol-screening sites will be conducted during the month. Alcohol Awareness Month is sponsored by the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence to educate and raise public awareness about the disease of alcoholism, that it *is* a treatable disease, not a moral weakness, and that alcoholics are capable of recovery. An integral part of Alcohol Awareness Month has been Alcohol-Free Weekend, which takes place on the first weekend of April.



For more information on local activities, or to get involved in reducing the incidence of underage drinking please call Amy Chao at (925) 313-6636.

Project Will Help Increase Prenatal Care for Latinas

We are among four health systems in the state selected to participate in a reducing health disparities project coordinated by the University of California, San Francisco and the California Association of Public Hospitals and Health Systems' Safety Net Institute. We'll use funding provided by the project for a one-year pilot to improve prenatal care for Latina women at our Bay Point, Brentwood and Pittsburg Health Centers. Statistics show that pregnant Latina women in East County are less likely to receive prenatal care in the first and second trimesters than White women. The pilot will assess barriers to Latinas receiving prenatal care. The project began in February with the creation of a team of seven staff members, including Jeff Smith, MD, CEO of CCRMC; Jose Martin, our Reducing Health Disparities Initiative Leader; Sonia Sutherland, MD, Medical Staff President; Chris Farnitano, MD, Ambulatory Care; Dianne Dunn-Bowie, RN, Director of Ambulatory Care; Shelley Pighin, Health Services Personnel Officer; and Cynthia Hellmuth, RN, CCRMC Director of Hospital Nursing. The project will include collaboration with Public Health Division's Family, Maternal and Child Health program and other divisions. The other participants in this statewide project, named LEAD for "LEADing Organizational Change: Advancing Quality through Culturally Responsive Care," are San Mateo, Los Angeles and San Joaquin counties.



See statistics about this issue on our Intranet (type cchs from any CCHS computer). For more information, call Jose Martin at 925-370-5055 or e-mail him at jmartin@hsd.co.contra-costa.ca.us.