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Taking the Long View

In the midst of yet another round of budget reductions, there can be a sense of futility — a feeling that what we've worked for is not respected and protected. While program cuts and layoffs are going to be painful, I think it's also important during hard times like this for us to take the long view.

In the old days

When I came to work for the county in 1974 as a physician, the idea of the county having a prepaid health plan was a new one. We started small but now three decades later, CCHP is flourishing with more than 64,600 people enrolled in CCHP programs, more than 9,000 of whom are County employees.

One issue I encountered immediately when I began that year was the obvious need for more functional clinic space in Oakley, where I worked. In fact, one of my first jobs was putting up sheet "walls" in the Oakley clinic to provide at least the illusion of privacy for our patients. Of course, that was to be a short-term arrangement. In reality, we moved from Oakley to a site in Brentwood in 1980. We soon outgrew that site. It took until 2005 for us to open the new Brentwood Health Center, fully 31 years after my Oakley days.

For any of you who have been here for some years, you can probably think of other examples. I certainly can. In 1982 the Board of Supervisors approved replacement of our hospital. Financial constraints delayed that process for many years. We finally opened the new Contra Costa Regional Medical Center in 1998.

Changes in health care in some areas occur rapidly, especially with the implementation of new technology. Just consider the use of CAT scans and MRI, new medications that come out annually, and the use of information technology to streamline our recordkeeping and research.

Reasons for hope

On the other hand, some changes occur more slowly, especially those in the public sector and particularly those that involve rebuilding

our facilities. Despite that, we have been in the midst recently of remodeling or rebuilding in every section of the county. Except Richmond.

Those of you who work at the Richmond Health Center know how badly a new facility is needed and for how long that has been true. The situation there underscores the principle that even long-established needs precede a solution — sometimes by many years. But there is reason to hope.

We are working once again with Richmond city officials to find a suitable site so we can secure financing to build a new health center. I'm hoping in the next few months we'll have identified a site to rebuild the RHC. We have been working on this task for a long time and we won't stop until we succeed.

Prevailing against obstacles

There are other areas in our community where we recognized a need, encountered many obstacles and still prevailed. The Crestwood Behavioral Center in Pleasant Hill is a good example. Opened by a private contractor to serve our Mental Health Division clients who were being sent outside the County for treatment, the 80-bed facility was not originally welcomed by the community. In fact, there was a year-long debate about whether it should be there. It's been operating for three years and now the center is accepted as a good neighbor.

Often programs for substance abusers are the most difficult for which to find a site. Yet, when we were planning the new Discovery

Continued next page



— Dr. Walker

DID YOU KNOW

Our Alcohol and Other Drugs Services Division provided **22,151** county residents with alcohol and drug prevention services last year.

House, neighbors came to testify about what good neighbors our clients were and to express support for our Alcohol and Other Drugs Services Division (AODS) plan to create a new facility. Discovery House opened last year after a multi-year planning process. The clients have remained good neighbors, volunteering for events such as First Night, the Amgen Tour of California, the annual Spring Cleaning and other local activities that the Chamber of Commerce or other groups request.

Those good relationships sometimes take a while, as with the Rosemary Corbin House in Hercules, which is administered by AODS, operated by Ujima Family Recovery Services and funded by First 5 Contra Costa for women substance abuse clients and their children. Not only were neighbors in the area concerned, but city officials were worried about the impact of such a program on the community. That is certainly understandable and whenever that happens, it often means that we have to slow down our pace until residents and others understand and share our vision. It's been four years and the program now garners praise from Hercules Police, neighbors and staff at the nearby school.

Seizing opportunities

Sometimes when we have a vision, we can't do much until an opportunity presents itself. That was the case in North Richmond, where a health center was a goal of the community. After General Chemical was required to pay fines for a hazardous materials release, and Chevron made a contribution, we were able to move ahead. That project still took a number of years, a lot of negotiating and much advocacy by the community to come to fruition.

I've talked a lot here about buildings. Similar long-term thinking is important when we look at some of our programs. We know that many grant funders anticipate that a year or two of funding will produce results. We know it usually takes longer — sometimes decades. One example is improving the early diagnosis of breast cancer among African American women.

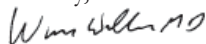
We knew African American women had a disproportionately high rate of death by breast cancer. Health advocates began working on the problem years ago. Eventually there was a state-funded program to expand those efforts. It took 10 years and exhaustive work with many partners to produce a significant change. When the disparity was finally eliminated, it was dramatic.

RHDI efforts

In our Reducing Health Disparities Initiative, we need to keep that same long view in mind. The disparities we are working to reduce have existed for many decades. It will take many years to see improvement on a countywide basis. We are focusing on planning and infrastructure now, both to build awareness and skills among our employees and to test technologies to support our improvement efforts. This work will allow us eventually to make significant progress in communitywide outcomes, where many factors are involved. I know it often seems quite slow, but I've learned that even seemingly "quick" results actually are based on years of effort.

There can be no doubt that in a period of budget cuts like we are facing now, it feels like we're taking steps backwards. I can't deny the reality of that feeling. It helps only a bit to know we're not alone in this as a County department, a California county or a public health system. It also helps to know that we have a long-term vision and that we will continue to pursue long-term plans to reach that vision.

Sincerely,



William Walker, MD

Budget Information

At the end of March we submitted a list of recommended budget cuts totaling \$14 million in county funds. These recommendations were made at the directive of the County Administrator and the Board of Supervisors based on the County's current financial situation. The four Divisions that would be affected are Alcohol and Other Drugs Services (AODS), Public Health, Mental Health and CCRMC/Health Centers. The Board will begin deliberating on the proposed reductions on April 25 with a public hearing. I will attend that hearing and will share with you any new information that impacts on the recommended cuts. The Board expects to adopt a final budget on May 2. As I have in the past, I ask you to continue providing the same fine quality work and attention to our patients, clients and community that you have in the past. These are difficult times and we need to support each other and our community. – WW

The Director's Report is published monthly. Deadline for the May edition is April 10. 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 the Intranet at cchs.

GOING THE EXTRA MILE FOR SERVICE EXCELLENCE

Honor Roll

Lolly Bhandal

*Staff LVN
Richmond Health Center*

For spending extra time translating and counseling my patient and for always being ahead of the game, scheduling follow-up appointments, being fantastic at patient education and keeping the clinic running smoothly.

—Nominated by Dr. Katrina Rapa

Mary Serb

*Certified Nurse Assistant
Psychiatric Emergency Services
CCRMC*

For doing CPR on her lunch hour as she was leaving the hospital until she could obtain assistance from the Emergency Department.

—Nominated by J. Barnhart, Assistant Director of Psychiatry and Detention Health

Gaynell Jackson

*Medical Records Clerk
Richmond Health Center*

For taking the initiative on numerous occasions to find a chart or paperwork and for always presenting herself in a positive manner.

—Nominated by Rachel Diaz

Lavonna James

*Senior Medical Record Technician
Richmond Health Center*

For always being helpful, always working hard, having a wonderful attitude and being helpful with patients, physicians, nurses and the medical records staff.

—Nominated by Dr. Jan Diamond

Doran Lamb

*Institutional Services Worker Lead
CCRMC*

For always being a smiling and positive presence and recently coordinating a move with General Services, and even coming by to check that everything went smoothly. Thank You Doran for your tremendous help and effort!

—Nominated by Maura Hoag

Sam Ramirez

*Telecommunications Specialist
Information Technology*

For responding immediately and enthusiastically to a request to fix the emergency phone line in the Public Health Operations Center.

—Nominated by Kim Cox and Dave Fry

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 Intranet.

Employee Milestones

Congratulations to these employees who have given us long years of service: Shideh Ataii, Ana-Leticia Kaminska, Leticia Schneider, Martha A. Flores, Edmundo L. Orozco, Cynthia Easton, Fernando Garcia, Charlene Barnes, Joy E. Wright (10 years); Kimberly C. Miller, Patricia L. Hill, Vicki A. Turner, Thomas E. Gamsky, Nancy J. Hill, Judith E. Whitworth, Deborah L. Curtis, Vincent A. Bell, Nancy J. Hayes, Gilbert Soberal, Daniel M. Guerra (15 years); Aurelia P. Barch, Rusty Keilch, Gregory C. Lawler, Psyche Murillo, Michael R. Donnelly, Maryanne R. DeMercurio, Rosalind R. Walker (20 years); Dennis Rosenblitt, Edna Ceguerra and Kim L. Neal (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.



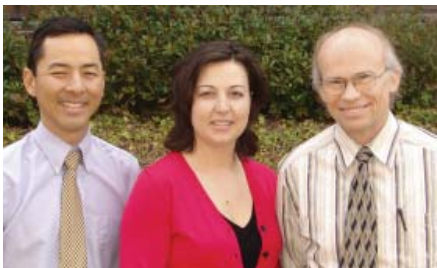
Diabetes Deaths A Major Health Disparity

This month's health disparity topic is the racial differences in diabetes-related deaths in our county. African Americans living in Contra Costa are three times as likely to die from the disease than the rest of the county. Latino residents also are more likely to die from diabetes than the rest of the county. (See our *Community Health Indicators for Selected Cities and Places in Contra Costa* available online at cchealth.org by clicking on Health Data.)

Improving care for diabetics, increasing culturally appropriate health education about diabetes self-care and tackling the causes of diabetes are key to reducing this disparity, according to Dr. Kate Colwell. Dr. Colwell is a physician at our Richmond Health Center (RHC) who is leading a project to improve the health of people with chronic diseases.

Contra Costa Regional Medical Center and Health Centers currently offers classes taught by dietitians and patient educators, but the self management approach is a shift in relating to patients and will require staff training, Dr. Cowell said. "This is a difficult task during a time of limited resources," she noted.

Other educational efforts include Contra Costa Health Plan's (CCHP) Living Well with Diabetes program, which encourages diabetics to speak with trained nurses to learn about how to control blood sugar levels. Materials are offered in both English and Spanish, said Otilia Tiutin, CCHP Manager of Health Education, Cultural and Linguistic Services.




(Pictured from left to right) Dr. Troy Kaji, Richmond Health Center; Otilia Tiutin, CCHP Manager of Health Education, Cultural Linguistics Services; and Ken Tilly, CCHP Quality Management Director.

African Americans, compared to our health plan membership as a whole, are significantly less likely to get eye exams to check for diabetes-related problems and also have poorer results for tests that measure long-term blood sugar control, said Ken Tilly, CCHP Quality Management Director.

To evaluate and focus efforts to reduce health disparities, Dr. Colwell is working with another RHC physician, Dr. Troy Kaji, and Information Services to customize CCHS' diabetes registry to allow for reporting by patient ethnicity and language. The registry will provide clinicians information about whether diabetic patients have had lab tests or other needed care, allowing for intervention to improve care and decrease the risk of early disability or death. Plans are to have the enhanced registry available countywide by 2008. CCRMC and Health Centers also recently secured a \$100,000 grant from Kaiser Permanente to evaluate health education for chronic care in our system.

To address the major causes of diabetes – obesity, lack of exercise and poor diet – Public Health's Community Wellness & Prevention Program is working on nutrition and healthy living education and outreach programs.

 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 on the Intranet by typing chs in your browser field.

Health Care Interpreter Equipment Being Tested

As part of the Reducing Health Disparities Initiative, Ambulatory Care and our hospital are testing the Health Care Interpreter Network's (HCIN) new remote video/voice medical interpreting equipment. The equipment is being tested during March and April at Concord and Martinez Health Centers, as well as the Emergency Department and Psychiatric Emergency Services. CCHS now primarily uses bilingual CCHS personnel in person or contracted interpreters by phone to provide language assistance for patients/clients. The HCIN system allows providers and their patients to access trained medical interpreters at an inhouse call center via a combination of video and telephone technology. The new system provides quick, simple, reliable access within a standard of no more than five minutes to have an interpreter available, and it is less expensive than the contracted outside services. So far, staff who have used it like it very much. Once the test is complete in mid April, we will decide about keeping and possibly expanding the system. This project is a collaboration between Contra Costa, San Joaquin, San Mateo and San Francisco counties and is paid for entirely by grant funds raised by the Network.



For more information about the HCIN system, contact our RHDI Leader José Martín at 925-957-5426 or jmartin@hsd.cccounty.us



Mary Serb

Employee Handles Emergency with Calm Response

Mary Serb, Certified Nurse Assistant at our Psychiatric Emergency Services unit, was leaving the hospital on her lunch break recently. As she arrived in front of the PES entrance, a car pulled up to the curb. A young lady jumped out and screamed, “My friend stopped breathing!” Mary assisted in getting the woman out of the car and onto the sidewalk, checked for pulse, respiration and response and then began CPR. She did so very calmly. Having no mask or barrier, she instructed the friend to give respirations while she did the chest compressions. They maintained CPR, with Mary supervising, until someone could go to the Emergency Department and obtain assistance. Thinking that she had exhausted the majority of her lunch break, Mary returned to work. “Mary acted as a rescuer and an instructor. A thumbs up to a job well done,” says Jeff Barnhart, Assistant Director of Psychiatry and Detention Health.

Alcohol Awareness Month Heralds ‘A Call to Action’

Alcohol Awareness Month, sponsored by the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD) since 1987, began as a way of educating and raising public awareness about the disease of alcoholism. The theme for 2006 is “A Call to Action.” An integral part of Alcohol Awareness Month is Alcohol-Free Weekend, (April 7-9) during which NCADD extends an open invitation to all Americans to engage in three alcohol-free days. Alcohol-Free Weekend is designed to raise public awareness about the use of alcohol and how it may be affecting individuals, families, and businesses. Last year in Contra Costa County, youth developed a logo and a media campaign called “Lock It Up” to raise awareness among parents and adults about youth access to alcohol. In addition to “Lock It Up,” local events and alcohol screening sites will be conducted in April to celebrate the 20th Annual Alcohol Awareness Month, which is kicked off April 4 with a proclamation from the Board of Supervisors.



For more information, please call Fatima Matal Sol at (925) 313-6311 or visit our website at cchealth.org for a calendar of related events.

HIV/AIDS Awareness Month in May, but Activities Start Soon

Spring will be alive with community events to raise awareness of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the importance of taking the HIV test. Organized by community organizations, these events provide opportunities for residents to learn about prevention, risk reduction and local resources. “Monument Pride – How to Protect Yourself” will take place April 9 in Concord’s Meadow Homes Park, 1371 Detroit Ave. It is produced by Monument Futures and the Concord Community Economic Development Organization. On April 29, “Celebrating North Richmond History and AIDS Awareness” will take place at our North Richmond Center for Health, 1531 Third St., with help from our Healthy Neighborhood Project Action Team for North Richmond. An ArtsChange exhibit titled “Stitches in Time” featuring the stories of people living with HIV/AIDS and their diets will be displayed in May at our Richmond Health Center, 100 38th St. “Protect Yourself” is also the theme of an HIV Awareness Carnival May 12 at Planned Parenthood Concord, 2108 Grant St. The East County HIV/AIDS Task Force will host the Contra Costa AIDS Awareness Month BBQ Picnic May 13 in Pittsburg’s Buchanan Park, 4150 Harbor St., and at 7 p.m. May 27, Walnut Creek United Methodist Church will host “Tongues Untied,” an event for LGBTQ youth sponsored by the Center for Human Development.



For more information, contact Rhonda Choi of the AIDS Program at rchoi@hsd.cccounty.us or 925-313-6775.

Email Addresses Get Leaner

After years of hard work and testing, Information Systems (IS) is pleased to authorize use of a shorter email address that all county departments will be switching to in coming years. For us, the address will still be your user name (usually first initial and last name), but now followed merely by @hsd.cccounty.us instead of @hsd.co.contra-costa.ca.us. Dale Miller of IS says the old address will still work through at least February 2008. Consequently, there is no immediate need to change stationery and other materials until supplies run out or there is no cost associated with the change. New orders should use the new address. The address can also be given out, saving our clients and associates untold time and errors with its simpler URL. Thanks IS!



CCHS Health Emergency Response Coordinator Kim Cox and Emergency Preparedness Manager Dan Guerra take a look at the CDC's Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication: By Leaders for Leaders workbook at a recent media training.

Emergency Management Team Staff Participates in Media Training

Our Emergency Management Team (EMT) and other senior staff who might serve as spokespersons during a crisis recently participated in a media workshop, CDC's Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication: By Leaders for Leaders. The two-hour training was held at the March 6 EMT meeting and attended by 45 people including CCHS Director William Walker and Public Health Director Wendel Brunner. County supervisors also have sponsored separate trainings for elected officials and other leaders. The workshop is part of a series of trainings for EMT staff, which would work at our Department Operations Center or our division operations centers when activated during a health emergency. The next EMT meeting on June 5 features a workshop on Action Planning.


 For more information about the media workshop, contact Julie Freestone, who is certified by the CDC to teach the course, at jfreesto@hsd.cccounty.us or 925-313-6268.

CCHS to Participate in Multi-Year Grant

Kaiser Permanente has awarded a five-year Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) Community Health Initiative grant to the West County Health Improvement Network – a group of 20 agencies to promote physical activity and healthy nutrition in the City of Richmond, North Richmond and Old Town San Pablo. The network includes the Neighborhood House of North Richmond as the lead, plus the West Contra Costa Unified School District, community organizations, Public Health's Community Wellness & Prevention Program and our Center for Health in North Richmond. Chinyere Madawaki, Manager of the Center for Health, said this is a wonderful opportunity to serve our patients and residents, and not just clinically. She said the network will collaboratively address issues of access to nutritious foods, lack of safety in the built environment, violence, and local policies that affect families' ability to eat healthy and exercise within their communities.




Enjoying the March 15 kickoff event for the Community Health Initiative grant are, from left, Chinyere Madawaki, Richmond Mayor Irma Anderson and Barbara Becnel of the West County Community Health Improvement Network.

 For more information about the HEAL grant, call Chinyere Madawaki, MPH at 510-374-7344.

Children's Oral Health Program Wins Grant

The Children's Oral Health Program was awarded a grant last month by the San Francisco Foundation. The grant application was submitted in partnership with the Ronald McDonald Care Mobile. The \$120,000 grant covers three years and will pay for a Care Coordinator to increase our capacity to link children with a dental care "home." The Contra Costa Children's Oral Health Access Project will also expand the existing services of the Ronald McDonald Care Mobile. It is a project that will create a more cohesive, comprehensive system of care for children needing oral health services in our county. Congratulations to Lynn Pilant, Padmini Parthasarathy, and Lorena Martinez Ochoa for their great work on this proposal.

 For more information about the Children's Oral Health Program, contact Lynn Pilant at lpilant@hsd.cccounty.us or 925-313-6163.