Celebrating 65 Years of Physician Training

This month we celebrate a long legacy of training new doctors with the 65th anniversary of the start of our residency program.

Our residency program is near and dear to my heart, and plays a central role in our hospital and clinic system. Founded by Dr. George Degnan in 1950 as a General Practice residency, the program evolved in 1975 into a Family Medicine residency, which included a broader spectrum of services to prepare doctors to care for all ages and stages of life. Today, it is a nationally recognized program and one of the largest Family Medicine residency programs in the country.

I came to work as a family physician for Health Services the year before the program change. My first experience was running a small outpatient clinic in Oakley with bedsheets serving as walls for patient rooms. What was supposed to be a temporary clinic for one year, lasted six. This rustic setting served as an opportunity for residents and nurse practitioner students to rotate through the clinic to learn what rural care was all about (though I like to joke it was almost a third world care setting because of those sheets).

Part of our History and Future

If we had asked ourselves back then what our health system should look like today, I think we would have described something close to what we have now. We likely would have said we want to continue operating a small hospital and have large number of outpatient health centers (we have 11 today). We would want a residency program and a health plan that actually enrolled people to have continuity of care with us. We would want to be integrated with Public Health and Behavioral Health. We would want to have the ability to provide fully integrated, long term care for people, and physicians to be able to do it. And that’s the model we have—and in fact, that’s the model health care reform calls for.

Family Medicine Focus

Our system has had a long tradition of training family practice residents not only to do family practice but also to take on much higher level specialty care than most programs offer. Most of the training is hands-on, during patient care in our Health Centers and at Contra Costa Regional Medical Center. About 70 of the physicians in our system do some level of teaching in our residency program, including myself in the past.
We have a tradition of family practitioners taking on specialty positions in our system and that has really lead us to the concept that specialty services ought be used appropriately, but shouldn’t be over relied upon. Over reliance on specialty care, in my opinion, has been the downfall of the American medical system. There has been an over dependence on specialty care and the lack of development of primary care throughout the country, and we are beginning to face the consequences of that now- with the burgeoning undersupply of family practitioners and oversupply of specialists.

Our system had the foresight to know that you can build a system with fully competent, trained family practitioners, offer full spectrum of care, use specialty services appropriately, and provide a training ground to attract the best medical students from around the country. Our program receives more than 750 applicants for our 14 positions annually from the best medical schools in the country, an indicator of how highly valued our training program is.

Medical residents come to our program because our system values family medicine doctors, is committed to the community and the underserved, and provides the opportunity to care for patients from birth throughout their lives. Probably the most important lesson I learned in starting that clinic in Oakley was the fact of how important it was to me to have continuity of care with my patients.

**Filling a Need**

We are currently still the only training program in Contra Costa County and produce about 14 doctors a year. We have trained a large number of physicians who have stayed in our own system, and we also have supplied new doctors for other area health systems, including Kaiser, John Muir and Sutter.

More family medicine doctors are badly needed as the Affordable Care Act has expanded enrollment in Medi-Cal for a large number of people who were previously uninsured. Primary care is extremely important to the American health system, our local community and our own health system.

We can be proud of the fact we have a training program producing highly qualified physicians. I am grateful to Dr. Degnan for his wisdom in starting a training program so many decades ago, and thank him and the many past and present residents and training physicians for their contributions to our health system and community.

Sincerely,

William B. Walker, M.D.
Public Health Director Wendel Brunner Retires This Month

After more than three decades with Contra Costa Health Services, Dr. Wendel Brunner retires this month as Public Health Director. Dr. Brunner joined the county as a staff physician in 1979, working first at the Richmond Health Center before taking over the helm of Public Health in 1983. A leader in his field, Dr. Brunner initiated and implemented a campaign making Contra Costa the first multi-jurisdictional county in the United States to adopt a uniform ordinance restricting smoking in the work site and in public places in 1984. Since then, he has led efforts to regulate second-hand smoke, combat obesity and reduce health disparities in the community. Under his leadership, Public Health worked with the city of Richmond to include a standalone health element in its general plan – making Richmond among the first cities in the nation to do so. He also led CCHS in a successful response to the H1N1 pandemic in 2009. In addition to his role as Public Health Director, Dr. Brunner was a founding co-chair of the Bay Area Regional Health Inequities Initiative, co-chair of the California Conference of Local Health Officers’ Chronic Disease Control Committee and a member of the Tobacco Education and Research Oversight Committee. He also developed and taught a class, “Politics, Policy and Practice in Public Health,” for five years at the UC Berkeley School of Public Health and has published in the fields of biochemistry, immunology, epidemiology and public health policy and practice. Recruitment for a new Director is underway. Dr. Brunner’s last day with Public Health is June 26. He will continue part time with CCHS, helping support integration efforts in our Behavioral Health Division. Congrats on your retirement Wendel, and Happy Sailing!

Public Health Lab Inspecting More Meats for Contamination

Our Public Health Laboratory recently expanded its testing of chicken and turkey sold at local markets for bacteria that make people sick. In April, the lab began buying 40 packages of retail chicken—up from the 10 packages a month it tested in the past—and doubled the amount of ground turkey it tested to 20 packages. The expansion of the poultry testing was made possible by increased federal funding following a multistate salmonella outbreak in 2013 and 2014 involving chicken from Foster Farms. Our lab is the only one in the state that provides this kind of testing of retail meats. The lab regularly tests poultry and other meats, including ground beef and pork chops, for salmonella and other bacteria from stores in Contra Costa, Alameda County and San Francisco. The lab shares its findings with the Food and Drug Administration and the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention. Its past surveillance work helped identify Foster Farms chickens in the recent multistate salmonella outbreak, which was recently the subject of the PBS documentary, The Trouble with Chicken.

For more information, contact Director of Public Health Laboratory Services Melody Hung-Fan at 925-370-5775.

The next Director’s Report will be the July/August issue. To publicize upcoming CCHS events and successes, contact Kate Fowlie at kate.fowlie@hsd.cccounty.us or 925-313-6636. The Director’s Report is available online at cchealth.org/newsroom and on isite at http://cchs/
Supervisors Back Bill Requiring Vaccinations for Schoolchildren

The Contra Costa Board of Supervisors approved a resolution last month supporting state legislation requiring children in schools and childcare facilities to be vaccinated unless they have medical exemptions. Senate Bill 277 would eliminate so-called “personal belief exemptions,” which allow parents to not vaccinate their children for non-medical reasons. In recent years, the number of personal belief exemptions has increased in California, raising public health concerns about the spread of vaccine-preventable diseases, such as measles. A measles outbreak originating from Disneyland sickened nearly 170 people from 20 states this year. Erika Jenssen, our Public Health Division’s Communicable Disease Programs Chief, told the Board it’s important to maintain high vaccination rates to preserve “community immunity,” which provides protection for those who can’t be immunized because of medical reasons or because they’re too young. Data show that many elementary schools in the county have measles vaccination rates well below 94%—the rate needed to prevent the spread of the virus—with some schools having rates below 50%. The state Senate recently passed SB 277, which is now headed to the Assembly.

To find out personal-belief exemption rates at schools and childcare facilities in Contra Costa, use our searchable map at cchealth.org/immunization/school-iz-levels.php

AMR, Contra Costa Fire Team Bid For Ambulance Contract

Our Emergency Medical Services Division (EMS) received one response to its request for proposals for a new contract to provide emergency ambulance service throughout much of Contra Costa County, and has begun the process of evaluating it. American Medical Response (AMR) and the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District jointly submitted the only proposal by the May 21 deadline, responding to two different service models: One similar to the county’s current model, and another with extensive strategies to optimize services while matching emergency ambulance service levels to patient need, based on recommendations in the EMS Modernization Project Report. EMS is seeking a qualified ambulance provider to serve all parts of the county, excluding areas served by the San Ramon Valley and Moraga-Orinda fire districts, on a 5-year contract with a 5-year renewal option based on performance. The Board of Supervisors will select its preferred model when it formally accepts a proposal. AMR holds the current contract, which runs through the end of this year.

For a timeline of the RFP process and links to electronic documents, including the RFP, visit cchealth.org/ems/rfp.php.
CCHP Advice Nurses Connect West County Residents to Care
After the closure of Doctor’s Medical Center (DMC) in April, our Advice Nurse Unit has handled 1,391 calls from West County residents and made 217 referrals to Lifelong’s new urgent care services in San Pablo through May 26. Contra Costa Health Services (CCHS) has been promoting our Contra Costa Health Plan’s Advice Nurse line as a healthcare resource to West Contra Costa residents. Uninsured county residents can call the 24/7 advice nurse line for free. Lifelong’s urgent care clinic, located across the street from DMC, was opened in April to help provide care to patients who would have previously gone to the now-closed hospital. CCHS has been distributing a resource list on healthcare resources for West County residents, which is available in several languages, including Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese and Laotian. CCHP’s advice nurses can suggest self-care treatments and help patients determine what kind of care they might need. Since DMC closed, CCHP advice nurses have helped many callers meet their needs without having to go to an emergency room or seek urgent care. The advice nurse line typically handled about 500 total calls a day and there has been an increase in call volume since DMC closed.

For more information on healthcare resources in West County, visit cchealth.org/dmc

HazMat Chief Earns Award for Contributions to State Environmental Policy
Hazardous Materials Programs Chief Randy Sawyer has been recognized by the California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA) for his work shaping state environmental protection policy with the 2015 Secretary’s Award for Environmental Achievement. Randy, who serves as chief environmental health and hazardous materials officer for Contra Costa’s Certified Unified Program Agency (CUPA), has been a vital contributor to efforts to improve the California Accidental Release Prevention Program (CalARP), and his work has been essential to the success of the CalEPA Interagency Refinery Task Force. He serves on CUPA’s policy-setting body and in a leadership position for CalARP, which audits safety plans, performs inspections and investigates chemical releases and accidents at industrial facilities. Randy also helped write the county’s Industrial Safety Ordinance, now recognized as one of the most effective industrial safety regulatory programs in the U.S. The Contra Costa Board of Supervisors recognized Randy and the award at its May 12 meeting.
Behavioral Health Names New Deputy Director

Behavioral Health Director Cynthia Belon announced in May that Matthew Luu will be the new BH Deputy Director. Luu fills a key position as BH continues its efforts to integrate its mental health, homeless services and alcohol and other drugs programs. A licensed social worker, Luu has more than 20 years of clinical experience serving clients with various behavioral health needs, including 15 years at Contra Costa Health Services. He has served in a variety of roles at Behavioral Health, including Case Manager, Team Leader, Program Supervisor and Program Manager, and most recently as a Program Manager at Contra Costa Regional Medical Center and Health Centers. He has extensive experience in the inpatient, outpatient, day program, and residential treatment settings, and his accomplishments include the development of Rapid Access Program in West County, overseeing the opening of Concord Health Center 2 and George and Cynthia Miller Wellness Center, and the development of a new Mental Health referral system through ccLink. As the Deputy Director for Behavioral Health, Matthew will serve as the Chief Operations Officer and will be responsible for consolidating functions related to the daily operations of the Division and integration across the systems of care.

Nominate Someone for the Ruth Pease Award

Do you know someone who has gone to extraordinary lengths to help patients? If so, nominate them for the Ruth Pease Award! This award is given by the medical staff to a non-physician who exemplifies the dedication of Ruth Pease, a longtime CCHS nurse who worked enthusiastically and tirelessly to positively affect bedside care delivery. Nominees must be a current county health professional, actively engaged in delivery of high quality patient-centered care, and have a passion for change. Be sure to include nominee’s name, work location and reason why you are nominating them. This year’s award winner will be honored at the annual Medical Staff Dinner & Dance on Sept. 25.

Please submit your nominations via email to spfister@hsd.cccounty.us no later than Monday, July 6.

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MAY MILESTONES

Congratulations to these employees who have given us long years of service: Edney F. Suisala, Patricia R. Tanquary, Carree A. Coley, Honette R. Bermudez, Liza M.C. Butorac, Sarahvone Calhoun, Rebecca S. Carr, Marietta R. Ciriac, Tiawna Dominguez, Holly L. Edmark, Stacy L. Gentry, Punam Joshi, Ma Fe B. Monreal, Linda M. Robbinsarnt, Carol Vasquez, Janet L. Gonzales, Lisa A. Sarao Ewing, Maria C. Banales, Gina M. Soleimanien, Tiina M. Waser, Isabel Oroso, Elmer K.B. Varsuvio, Oralia Nunez, Sonia O. Huezo, Leticia Espinoza, Bryan D. Narcisse (10 years); Fonnie Mo Au, Maura J. Hoag, Marina M. Rowoldt, Josephine S. Gonsalves, Glynis J. Samb, Julia R. Andrews, Shawna M. Lee, Lizette A. Trice, Jose C. Saavedra, Rita V. Perez, Shahrazad Klingner, Kathy E. Johnson, Wendy J. Escamilla (15 years); Laura C. Easley, Pedro A. Martinez, Marcia L. Furtado, Edna Riwkes, Ofelia M. Dimas, Maria T. Padilla, Lori A. Carone, Betty A. Carpiso, Lucy Rodriguez, Latonya Davis, Jennifer L. Sullenger, Manuel L. Llamas, Erik F. Blanek, Ernesto R. Abuejuela (20 years); Chungpei W. Loor, Maria A. Ruiz Castillas, Jacqueline D. Pigg, Rosario Dela Cruz, Cathy C. Bennett, Donna M. Garro (25 years); and Carol A. Linton (30 years).

Due to a production error, we ran the wrong Milestones in the May issue. This is the correct version.
Donna Kimmel
Grace Costa
Clinical Systems Analyst I
Lee Schugar
Timothy “TJ” Speakman
Information Systems Technician II
Melissa Stewart
Systems Analyst II
Jie Zhou
IT Project Manager

For helping to organize and support the testing event to select a barcode-scanner vendor. For performing with positive, team-oriented attitudes to overcome logistical and system challenges to make the testing successful.
◆Nominated by Jenne Gossett

Griselda Garibay
Community Health Worker I
Public Health
For her friendly and peaceful demeanor. For her attentiveness to our patients.
◆Nominated by Megan McCabe

Teenage Pregnancy Prevention Health Educators
Public Health
For going above and beyond to provide excellence when teaching Comprehensive Sexual Health Education in West Contra Costa and Pittsburg Unified School Districts.
◆Nominated by Dora Regalado

Steve Dinning
Supervisor
Information Technology
For his prompt, courteous and knowledgeable support of our Access database. For helping us recover lost data for a critical project.
◆Nominated by Rachael Birch

Claudia Viscarra
Clerk-Senior Level
Public Health
For always being kind to patients and staff. For being available for support and help with any issue or question.
◆Annette Ramirez

Marianne Hardin Elling
Substance Abuse Counselor
Behavioral Health Services
For going above and beyond to help a client find the resources he needed.
◆Nominated by Esther Gutierrez

Ernest Johnson
Member Services Counselor
Contra Costa Health Plan
For going above and beyond to help a CCHP member in her efforts to resolve a billing issue.
◆Nominated by Belkys Teutle

Donald Gomez
Patient Financial Services Specialist
Contra Costa Regional Medical Center and Health Centers
For demonstrating excellence while assisting a patient with her health insurance concerns.
◆Nominated by Sue Meltzer
You're a GEM for Going the Extra Mile

Shyni Subash, MD
Contra Costa Regional Medical Center and Health Centers
For being a great asset to the Concord Health Center by going above and beyond to accommodate patients’ needs and educate nursing staff regarding patients’ health issues.
♦ Nominated by Zohra Akbari

Loan Hoang
Medical Interpreter
Public Health
For being a dedicated and devoted medical Interpreter. For going above and beyond to be available to provide interpreter services to our patients.
♦ Nominated by Jamie Pehling

David Palomino
Mental Health Community Support Worker II
Behavioral Health Services
For being consistently tactful, respectful and empathetic. For going the extra mile to assist a patient in getting the help he needed.
♦ Nominated by Melinda Meahan

Colin Jack Fliehmann
Institutional Services Worker-Generalist
Contra Costa Regional Medical Center and Health Centers
For always greeting people by name and with a smile. For adding a bit of sunshine to others’ day with his positive and kind manner.
♦ Nominated by Catherine Audrey-Quinn

June Milestones

Congratulations to these employees who have given us long years of service: Martha M. McGhee, Patrick S. Worsham, Denice K. Tai, Lisa M. Quinones, Melissa M. Hubiak, Anna E. Fraser-Hulthage, Nicole J. Flowers, Karen Alingog, Danilo G. Ganancial, Harpreet K. Bains (10 years); Hermoso B. Igama, Ori Tzvieli, Brenda Reilly, Kristin A. Moeller, Cynthia F. Hellmulth, Martha C. Garza, Tuyet K. Dao, Courtney A. Beach, Gloria A. Pope, Peter A. Ordaz, Cindy N. Fernandez, Barbara L. Shafer, Lori A. Selby, James P. Ruiz, Shirley A. Perry, Vannessa C. Meier, Roderick B. Hewitt, Judy Ann D. Gonzalez, Jose A. Colaizzo, Oludolapo A. Macaulay (15 years); Amy Buoncristiani, Veda S. Bhatt, Haydee Wong, Lisa S. Derita, Lisa M. Felix, Dawna M. Henderson, Marilyn M. Thomas-Franklin, Julie Custer-Ortega (20 years); David J. MacDonald, Stuart Forman, Yueh-Kuang Peng, Ingrid R. McDowell, Lani Ching (25 years); Leigh A. Pierson Brown (30 years); and Zabeth Y. Cooper (40 years).

To recognize a CCHS employee, vendor or volunteer for outstanding Service Excellence performance, submit the commendation form by email to wanda.session@hsd.cccounty.us or fax to 925-957-5401. Forms are on our website (cchealth.org on the About Us page) or iSITE, our intranet, at http://cchs/ Nominations are subject to approval by Division Directors.