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Challenges and Opportunities

One of my roles this year will be to serve as the Chair of the California Association of Public Hospitals and Health Systems (CAPH), a task that I also took on in 2001. I thoroughly enjoy the opportunity to work with extraordinarily talented colleagues around the state and to share and benefit from best practices developed in our sister organizations.

Precarious time for public hospitals

It is a time consuming effort – one that experienced health system executives across the state share on a rotating basis. Although I wish it were otherwise, this is a particularly precarious time for our own Regional Medical Center (CCRMC) as well as all public hospitals in California. CAPH is the single voice for the 22 public hospitals and health systems in the state in dealing with the State Department of Health Services, the state legislature and the Governor. They have been extremely effective in preserving resources for public health care systems, so I am glad to serve my term as CAPH chair.

Challenges loom

We're in the midst of a dramatic transition in how we receive federal and state matching funds for MediCal. Among other things, the federal government is cutting back \$5 billion nationwide on Medicaid and giving states a lot of increased "flexibility" for how they administer the program. The state has created a "food fight," where there will be winners and losers among public systems. As a group we'll have to negotiate among ourselves to decide how to split up a small pot of money that is insufficient for all of our needs.

Although it seems early to start discussing local budget problems, we already know that the county again has a major deficit in the coming year. I anticipate layoffs again this year. On March 1, County Administrator John Sweeten will retire. He will be replaced by John Cullen, who is currently Director of the County's Employment and Human

Services Department. I am delighted and optimistic about Mr. Cullen's appointment and the fact that former County Administrator Phil Batchelor will be serving as a consultant on budget issues.



— Dr. Walker

Opportunities to save lives

Against this somewhat daunting budget backdrop are some very exciting efforts underway at CCRMC. Under Executive Director Dr. Jeff Smith's direction, Dr. Steven Tremain is leading the medical center's effort to redesign its systems to focus on increased effectiveness, efficiency and safety. He has assembled a multidisciplinary System Redesign Team comprised of Anna Roth, RN, Ramon Berguer, MD, Jon Stanger, MD, Julie Kelley, MPH, MSW, Maura Hoag and Aina Wirthlin. This team, supported by the Performance Improvement Committee of the Medical Staff, is working with several teams to improve health outcomes and patient safety as part of the nationwide "100,000 Lives Campaign" sponsored by the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (www.ihl.org). This campaign looks at six key issues that have been shown to dramatically affect patient outcomes. While the campaign aims to prevent mistakes that cost lives – of which

Continued next page

DID YOU KNOW

Our Medical Center and Health Centers received **404,500** medical visits in 2005.

Director's Message Continued...

we have had relatively few incidents – it can also shorten stays in the hospital and reduce complications from surgery and from medication errors. Staff at CCRMC are evaluating patient care processes, adopting proven strategies from other organizations, and adapting them to CCRMC. I am very proud that we are taking a leadership role in this campaign.

Other innovative approaches

Dr. Smith points out that a health care system, among other things, is a processing unit for information and people. In the medical field, communication of information – both from one shift to another and from one unit to another – is critical. Traditionally, much is left to the individual to decide what's important and how to transfer the information. Unfortunately, research shows that when mistakes are made, communication is usually to blame. In an attempt to improve communication, CCRMC has three initiatives of its own: all verbal orders are read back for accuracy; staff is evaluating the use of a communication methodology called SBAR for critical patient situations; and trainings are beginning to teach staff in crucial conversational skills.

Some of our staff recently attended a conference where they heard how a customer-centered concept used by Toyota is being applied to medical settings. Everyone involved has the authority and ability to stop a process if they believe the outcome isn't good. That's a great approach, where everyone owns and can improve the outcomes.

Patient safety is also a major emphasis of our CAPH sister institutions. We all view our role as the safety net for the ever-increasing number of uninsured. We want the delivery systems for our patients to provide high quality, safe care. Safer care is usually more efficient and less costly in the long run. Avoiding "rework" in medicine is not just good health care, but it avoids the costs associated with managing avoidable complications.

Despite the pressures of potential budget reductions, we have to continue to do the right thing in regard to our patients and demonstrate to our community and funders the value and quality of our health care system

Sincerely,



William Walker, MD

CCHS Employees Spearhead Fundraising

JoAnn Bishop and Terry Jacobsen spearheaded this year's very successful Charity Campaign in the department. They worked with coordinators throughout the Department including Larry Smith, Teresa O'Riva, Fran Newgard, Jan Millar, Brett Horton, Juana Fon, Pam Dodson, Mary Kooyman, Sherry Bradley, Rhonda Clancy, and Alexandra McMullen. As a result of their efforts, 1,163 employees contributed \$54,746 to a variety of local organizations, compared to \$50,234 in 2004. Thank you to all who contributed for your generosity. Just as the Charity Campaign was ending, the Holiday Food Drive for the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano began. Last year Health Services was the lowest contributing department for the whole county. This year we changed that dramatically, thanks to the dedication of repeat coordinators and the energy of new coordinators. Health Services employees contributed an impressive \$12,460 to the Food Drive. That total far exceeds the \$4,588 in cash raised in 2004 and is estimated to be equivalent to 37,381 pounds of food. Many thanks to Holiday Food Drive Coordinators Lenell Anderson, Kris Blakely, Lori Braunesreither, Jeannie DeTomas, Dan Guerra, Lindy Haagensen, Mary Kooyman, Deborah Manes, Mary McLain, Alexandra McMullen, Sharon Sloan, Sue Meltzer and Connie Ward. Thank you also to Mary Foran and Jackie Peterson for overall leadership and administrative support.

Health Plan Grievance Form Now Secure Online

Contra Costa Health Plan is now able to receive complaints online through a secured server thanks to work by staff from our Information Services (IS) and Community Education and Information (CEI) units. A new grievance form programmed by Shawn Eyer of CEI is available at cchealth.org, but the transmission of it by email does not use the Internet. Rather, it travels through the secured server set up by Dag Richards from IS. This ensures that it is secure enough to comply with the requirements of HIPAA, the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996. Good job!



For more information contact Tess O'Riva at toriva@hsd.cccounty.us or 925-313-6967.

GOING THE EXTRA MILE FOR SERVICE EXCELLENCE

Honor Roll

Omnicell Team

Information Systems

For their phenomenal support to the Pharmacy during the recent Omnicell “go live” project. Everything went very smoothly and whatever needed to be done was taken care of immediately.

—Nominated by Marcia Lopez

Ophthalmology Department

CCRMC

For piloting a paperless specialty referral process, first at the Richmond Health Center and then systemwide.

—Nominated by Dr. Troy Kaji

Teresa Lascano

*Ambulatory Care Clinic Coordinator
Martinez and Concord*

For shepherding a revised eye department billing form through a multiple step process.

—Nominated by Dr. Troy Kaji

If you'd like your staff or coworkers to experience a brief, enjoyable reminder of what Service Excellence is, contact our Personnel department to borrow the “Going the Extra Mile” video we produced about the subject. To borrow the 14-minute video, call 925-957-5252.

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: Dale Jenssen, Chung Sun Yi, Frances Newgard, Kristiane Cannon, Robert McKinnon, John Wiggins, Todd Paler (10 years); Carla Dockham, Diana St. Clair, Lorena Garcia, Leticia Hurtado, Margarita Vargas, Jo Macaluso (15 years); Melba Brillantes, Carla Contestable, Kathleen Janes, Teresita Cerbas, Andreina Ng, Robert Mason and Sonia Tikoo (20 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, 25, 30 and 35 years.)*

The Director's Report is published monthly. Deadline for the March edition is February 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.

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.



Chuck McKetney

Health Disparities Topics New Focus of RHDl Page

CCHS created the Reducing Health Disparities Initiative (RHDl) in May 2003 after an extensive employee-driven planning process and the release of the Institute of Medicine's Unequal Treatment report about the impact of race on health outcomes. Since then, reducing health disparities by addressing issues of diversity and linguistic and cultural competence has been an official, department-wide goal. CCHS did its own analysis, Community Health Indicators for Selected Cities and Places in Contra Costa, which revealed glaring health disparities that need to be addressed. People of color – African Americans in particular – have staggeringly high rates of death and disease compared to the rest of the county.

Over the past year, the efforts of our individual divisions have been outlined on this page. This year, as recommended by our RHDl Communications Committee, this page will focus on selected health disparity topics, who they affect and what we are doing about them. There are different ways of looking at health disparities: by race, by zip code, by income, etc. It's important to look at many indicators for health disparities, says Chuck McKetney, Director of our Community Health Assessment, Planning and Evaluation (CHAPE) unit, which compiled the community health indicators report. The report was funded by the Hospital Council of Northern and Central California.

Two indicators in particular are most telling: race and socio-economic status, the latter which includes a person's education level, income and other factors. "As we become increasingly diverse, we need to also become more culturally competent and sensitive," said Chuck, who also chairs our RHDl Evaluation Committee. "By looking at disparities and addressing the issues around them, we can better understand populations and groups that have the highest need." Upcoming topics on this page will include: homicide/violence, diabetes, prenatal care, low birth weight, obesity, asthma, HIV/AIDS and immunizations.

 For more information about our Community Health Indicators report, call Chuck McKetney at 925-313-6171 or email him at cmcketne@hsd.cccounty.us To give feedback about the RHDl page or suggest topics, contact Kate Fowlie at kfowlie@hsd.cccounty.us or 925-313-6832.

Staff Survey Shows Most Respondents Aware of RHDl

The majority of the 458 employees who responded to our recent RHDl awareness survey indicated they know about CCHS' formal initiative to reduce health disparities. The survey was sent out a few months ago to CCHS employees by email and through RHDl work group leaders, as well as posted on the Intranet. Seventy-seven percent of the respondents answered that they're aware of RHDl, and 67% responded that they get information about the initiative right here on the RHDl page. Of those who responded, 58% indicated they read the RHDl page monthly and 44% found it interesting and learned something from it about health disparities. Participants also said that, to help them explain health disparities and cultural competence, they use as resources the Intranet (25%), the public CCHS website (16%), our RHDl Leader Jose Martin (10%) and their division RHDl work groups (17%). Many respondents also included thoughtful and helpful comments. Many thanks to everyone who participated and to Kenneth Knight in CHAPE for analyzing the data. The full results of the survey will be posted shortly on the Intranet (type cchs in your browser).

African American Health Conductor Project Planned in Bay Point

The Bay Point Partnership for Public Health is poised this month to hire two local residents to be “health conductors” for African Americans in Bay Point. The project is funded by a Kaiser Community Benefit Grant through the Bay Area Black United Fund’s Health Conductor Initiative. The initiative describes health outreach in the terms of being a “conductor” modeled after Harriet Tubman, conductor for Southern slaves on the Underground Railway to freedom. In Bay Point, the conductors will work to increase use of the Bay Point Family Health Center by African Americans by helping educate local residents about available services as well as by assisting the Health Center become more culturally sensitive. The Bay Point conductors will be screened and mentored by a group including several CCHS staff: Lisa Booker, Deborah Card, Jeanne Walker Johnson, Suzzette Johnson and Tiombe Mashama. The conductors will work part-time and report to Connie James, manager of the Health Center.



For more information contact Connie James at cjames@hscd.co.contra-costa.ca.us or 925-427-8297.

‘Pumpkin, Greens and Catfish Stew’ on Display at Center for Health

“In Celebration of Pumpkin, Greens and Catfish Stew” is the colorful name of a current exhibit at the North Richmond Center for Health. Created by ArtsChange, the exhibit opened at a well-attended reception December 16 and is on display through March 1. The reception featured the work of the exhibit’s three artists – Candi Farlice, Tina Gray and Ann Schnake, who is a Family Nurse Practitioner at Richmond Health Center – plus contributions by the East Bay Center for Performing Arts, Verde Elementary School students and Eco-Village Farm & Learning Center. Guests numbered about 200 at the four-hour reception, including Supervisor John Gioia, Health Services Director Dr. William Walker and Public Health Director Dr. Wendel Brunner. Entertainment included a steel drum band, spoken word theater, a film sponsored by our Community Wellness & Prevention Program titled “Long Odds: Trying to Find an Apple in Richmond,” and a presentation about the community garden at Verde School. ArtsChange, formerly known as The Quilt of Many Colors, has been organizing visual art exhibitions and education programs in public venues since 1997, including our health centers.



Students from Verde Elementary School show off the fruits of their community garden at the reception.



For more information about the exhibit and ArtsChange, contact the organization at artschange@artschange.org or 510-231-1348.

Giving Kids a Smile for Children's Dental Health Month

Public Health's Children's Oral Health Program (COHP) is promoting National Children's Dental Health Month by educating families about the importance of oral health and helping them access dental care for their children. The COHP is coordinating Give Kids a Smile Day on February 3, when 250 children at five Head Start sites around the county will receive free preventive services and dental exams, and 60 children will receive free dental treatment in private pediatric dental offices. Also during February, home visitors with our Family Maternal and Child Health programs will be distributing perinatal oral health kits to their pregnant and parenting clients. These kits will contain adult toothbrushes, infant and child toothbrushes, xylitol gum, xylitol wipes, toothpaste, floss, and oral health education materials.

 Visit <http://www.cchealth.org/services/dental/> for more information about oral health in Contra Costa County.

Congratulations to Our Nominees

Congratulations to Cassandra Kolto and Cheri Pies, our respective nominees for the 2005 Gina Martin Employee of the Year and Manager of the Year for Contra Costa County. Cassandra is a Senior Patient Financial Services Specialist with the Mental Health Division who has worked for us for 11 years. She developed a system for to help Contra Costa residents placed in treatment centers and hospitals throughout the Bay Area to obtain Medi-Cal, Medicare and SSI benefits. This enables them "to be more financially self-sufficient and better able to obtain needed mental and physical health care," according to her nomination form. Cheri has been our director of Family, Maternal and Child Health Programs (FMCH) since 1997. Her nomination form noted how she promotes innovation in FMCH through introduction of such concepts as the Life Course model, which holds that family health is a result of factors all along the life course of an individual. Cheri and Cassandra were honored by the Board of Supervisor in a ceremony January 24 at which Thomas Riso with Employment and Human Services and Patrick Roche with Community Development were the award winners.



Cheri Pies



Cassandra Kolto

CCS, CARE Host Open House

Our California Children Services (CCS) and CARE Parent Network hosted an Open House for families before the holidays. Invitations were sent to all 2,800 Contra Costa families with children receiving services through CCS. The event provided an opportunity for families to interact with CCS and CARE staff, learn about programs and resources and have questions answered. Families heard from seven CCS and CARE staff, including Dr. Gwendolyn Johnson, CCS Medical Consultant, and Betsy Katz, CARE Parent Network Program Director. The morning's presentations were interpreted in Spanish. CCS provides medical case management, physical and occupational therapy, and authorizes payment of care for children with serious medical conditions. CARE Parent Network is the local family resource and support organization serving parents with children with special needs. While the Open House was lightly attended, those families present evaluated the event as highly successful and were pleased to receive individualized attention and information. Additional family activities will be planned for 2006 in various County locations.

 For more information about the CARE Network, visit ContraCostaARC.com or call 925-313-0999. For more information about CCS visit cchealth.org or call 925-313-6100.

Healthy Outlook Column Turns Two

Two years ago, CCHS physician Steve Daniels came up with the idea for a column on health issues written by our staff. He successfully pitched the idea to the Contra Costa Times newspaper and the column "Healthy Outlook" was born in November 2003. Since then, the column has covered a wide range of topics from breast cancer and Hepatitis C to bringing your medicine bottles to all doctor's visits and recognizing the signs of Alzheimer's. Some of the most popular columns have been on limiting salt intake to reduce swelling, addressing the sexual side effects of antidepressant medicines, hemorrhoids, cortisone shots for pain, the flu and depression. Dr. Daniels said the public response has been quite positive, and he gets thankful or questioning emails not only from people in our county but also from readers around the world who have read the column on the Internet. The column runs every other week in the Times' local weeklies such as the Concord Transcript, Walnut Creek Journal, and The Record, covering Martinez and Pleasant Hill. The column is also posted on our website (cchealth.org). It has received more than 14,000 web visits since its inception.



Steve Daniels, MD



For more information or to suggest a topic or write a column, contact Stephen Daniels, MD, who practices family medicine at our Pittsburg Health Center, at sdanielsmd@aol.com or 925-370-5200, ext 3553.

Prop. 63 Plan Approved by Supervisors, Submitted to State

Following a year of planning that included over 1,100 participants, our Mental Health has completed and submitted its first Three-Year Plan for Community Services and Supports in conjunction with Prop. 63, the Mental Health Services Act. The plan is now in a three-month review process by the State Department of Mental Health (DMH); the earliest we could receive funding is April or May. You can download a copy of the plan at: http://www.cchealth.org/services/mental_health/prop63.php. The number one area of need that came out of the planning process was housing for mental health consumers, including a full array of supportive housing. The Transition Age Youth Stakeholder Planners identified as its target population: "Youth who are homeless or those at imminent risk for homelessness." The Adult Stakeholder Planning group narrowly selected for its target population: "Adults who are homeless without shelter." At a public hearing December 7, local members of the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill and others publicly requested that this definition be broadened to add: "Adults who are at serious risk for homelessness." At the Board of Supervisor's meeting December 20, the plan was unanimously approved with an amendment to include "Adults who are homeless or at serious risk for homelessness." Children and older adults were also identified as populations in need of additional services.



For more information contact Kimberly Mayer at kmayer@hsd.cccounty.us or 925-957-5132.

'Mental Health Matters' Newsletter Now Online

The second issue of the Mental Health Division's electronic newsletter, Mental Health Matters, was released recently and posted online for the first time ever. The 10-page newsletter located at http://www.cchealth.org/groups/mental_health/newsletters.php is edited by Sherry Bradley. The latest issue features an item about Genoveva Calloway, a 20-year veteran program manager with Mental Health and the new mayor of San Pablo. Genoveva served as City Clerk from 1998-2002, then was elected to the City Council. On December 6, she was sworn in as the first ever Mexican American mayor of San Pablo. Congratulations Genoveva and Sherry!



Genoveva Calloway

Pharmacy Begins Partnership to Improve Patient Safety

The Medical Center Pharmacy staff is happy to have kicked off a partnership with Mountain View-based Omnicell to use new technology to improve patient safety. Contra Costa Regional Medical Center is serving as the flagship for several new systems created by Omnicell, a partnership that took flight in early December with implementation of the company's Medicine Cabinet product. "It has more functionality in terms of us being able to customize the security levels the way we want them to be," said Marcia Lopez, Director of Pharmacy Services, of the new medication dispensing system. The product includes features such as a time-saving automated inventory function and "Guiding Light" technology to prevent misplacement of medication. The pharmacy is also planning to start using Omnicell's Omnilink Rx, which is a computerized scanning, entry and filing system for faxed prescriptions. "We're excited. CCHS has made a commitment to using technology to improve patient safety, and this is an important step," said Marcia. "This is state-of-the-art, and it's nice to know that no one is going to have anything better than what we have."

 For more information, contact Marcia Lopez at mlopez@hsd.cccounty.us or 925-370-5597

Income Tax Help Is On the Way to Low-Income Residents

The "Earn It! Keep It! Save It!" campaign of free income tax preparation help is off to a good start in its third year. The project is a collaboration that includes Health Services, Employment and Human Services, United Way, First Five Contra Costa and other organizations. It helped low-to-moderate income people in Contra Costa claim more than \$2 million in 2004 tax credits and refunds. The tax preparation services are provided at locations all around the county, called VITA sites for Volunteer Income Tax Assistance. They are managed by volunteers such as our own Vicki Kirk, an Accountant III in CCHS Finance. The sites will be open through April 15.

 For more information about where and when the VITA sites are open, call 800-358-8832.



Vicki Kirk

New Environmental Health Chief Appointed

Sherman Quinlan has been appointed Environmental Health Director effective February 1. Sherman has been with our Environmental Health Division since 1996. Prior to that he served as Chief of Environmental Health at US Army Medical Center, Fort Sam Houston, Texas. He has been a Registered Environmental Health Specialist in California since 1971 and received his Masters of Public Health in Environmental Health from Loma Linda in 1986.



Sherman Quinlan