Sobering Thoughts for the Holidays

As we approach this holiday season, I’m sure we’ll all be hearing warnings and tips about how to avoid excess use of substances like alcohol. We know that at this time of year, people do abuse substances during celebrations. They also suffer depression and sadness around the holidays for many reasons. So it is certainly appropriate to turn attention to this issue in December.

Actually substance abuse involving drugs, alcohol and tobacco are huge factors year round that impact people’s health and drive up costs in our medical center and health centers as well as in our Mental Health, Public Health and Homeless programs. Substance abuse is a major predictor of injury and illness.

Sobering statistics

The statistics are sobering and discouraging. Well over two thirds of people seeking service in our Mental Health programs have a co-occurring substance abuse disorder. Among homeless individuals, 77% have substance abuse and mental health problems. Yet the sad fact is that substance abuse treatment and prevention services are the most under-funded part of our department.

Historically these services have been primarily state and federally funded and those funds have been shrinking. In my mind the cause of this problem is shortsightedness. Policy-makers elect to pay the downstream costs of substance abuse. They fund prisons and law enforcement without looking upstream at the causes. The numbers are compelling: Across the country, 84% of prisoners expecting to be released in 1999 were involved in alcohol and other drugs at the time of their arrest. In California, more than 21% of prison inmates in California are incarcerated because of a directly related substance issue – it’s an enormous cost to taxpayers. Voters understood the problem when they approved Proposition 36 four years ago. It provides for some diversion for certain classes of criminal charges rather than incarceration. However this is a limited program and it’s a drop in the bucket.

Broad impact

Those of us who see patients encounter issues ranging from methamphetamine addicts who come in in desperate straits and when offered the limited treatment available, often may not follow through. The heroin addicts we see may have had problems for decades and now have liver failure and are on the transplant list. We serve pregnant women who are using their pregnancy as a motivation to address their long-term substance abuse problems. We see closet drinkers who hide their problems from their physicians as well as friends and family. And we see youth who are exposed to the prevalent drug culture who could make an important choice in their lives by choosing treatment when they first hit bottom – their first DUI or expulsion from school.

Substance abuse affects a whole strata of patients in our system — county workers, poor people, old, young, male and female. Substance abuse should always be a question in the back of our minds when we’re dealing with patients. Although prevention and treatment programs may be underfunded, there are strategies available to us and it is important that we use the various screening tools that exist, patient interviews and resources available for referral.

Working to maximize resources

It is also critical that we maximize our limited resources by working together, breaking down the silos between our...
Director’s Message Continued...

To the prenatal services that CCRMC offers, AODS is working to add education, intervention and, if needed, referral to treatment for pregnant women with substance abuse problems. First Five Contra Costa is funding a consultant to encourage linkages with CCRMC/HCs, and collaboration with our Family, Maternal and Child Health programs and community-based treatment organizations so that anyone coming into our system to deliver babies will have complete access to comprehensive services. We need these earlier interventions for all women of childbearing ages to help change the negative outcomes on their children.

AODS Division Director Haven Fearn and CCRMC Director Dr. Jeff Smith plan more collaboration so that all AODS treatment clients have better access to health care and also to give all our patients better access to substance abuse services. That strategy will be challenging and will have to rely on developing additional resources and on referral to community resources.

Money up front

This is a rather bleak message for what is normally a joyous season. But it is an important one because I believe we can’t fix this resource problem as a health department. We have to get a message to the larger society that spending money up front for prevention and treatment saves lives and money down the road. Until we as a society adopt a treatment-over-punishment philosophy toward this illness, we will continue to reap the unpleasant consequences.

Here is the hopeful part: Perhaps a new Congress and a new Legislature may be more open to treating substance abuse as a disease rather than as a crime or moral defect. Perhaps leaders will be willing to fund desperately needed programs to cure the disease.

Meanwhile, for those of you who are living with this problem, know that there are services available. If you have a friend or family member who needs help, a good place to begin is with a phone call to AODS at 925-313-6387.

I wish all of you a safe, healthy and sober holiday.

Sincerely,

William Walker, MD

Regional Health Foundation Gala A Big Hit

The Contra Costa Regional Health Foundation held its third annual gala last month to support Contra Costa Regional Medical Center and our Health Centers. It was an impressive event with more than 200 people attending, including Congressman George Miller, Supervisor Gayle B. Uilkema, former supervisors Sunne McPeak and Bob Schroder and many community leaders, local residents and our staff. I was gratified by the level of support so many people showed by attending. When the Foundation was launched, we had an ambitious vision for encouraging community support for our public hospital. Thanks to the hard work of Foundation CEO Frank Puglisi, Foundation Board president Bette Felton and many others, the Foundation is now a reality. Seeing the support at the Foundation event for the work we do was very heartwarming. The event also honored two physicians, Kent Hobert and Mark Wille. Like many of our staff they have spent virtually their entire careers working for CCHS and serving Contra Costa residents. With that kind of dedication and commitment of all of you, we will continue to succeed and to overcome challenges we face. - WW

If you missed this event and would like to make a donation to the foundation, visit the Foundation’s website at ccrhf.org

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 iSite, our Intranet.

The Director’s Report is published monthly. Deadline for the January edition is December 11. 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.cccounty.us. The Director’s Report is available online at cchealth.org and on iSite, our intranet, at cchs.
GoinG The exTra Mile for Service Excellence

Honor Roll

Dental Program
CCRMC
For teamwork in arranging an appointment for a very dependent client, handling the paperwork, coordinating appointments and providing quality services.
—Nominated by Vidya Iyengar

Patricia Muñoz-Zuniga
Advice Nurse Manager
CCHP
For amazing work in preparing for a recent accreditation audit, showing absolute dedication in ensuring the necessary information was available to auditors, and being available for the audit while caring for a newborn.
—Nominated by Tess O’Riva

Ahna Suleiman
Director
TeenAge Program
For her tireless advocacy on behalf of school-based health services in the West Contra Costa Unified School District. She lifts people up with her passion and dedication, building teams to get a job done. Her kindness and sense of humor make difficult work less arduous.
—Nominated by Jennifer Rader, Director, El Cerrito High School Community Project

Carolyn Killough
Public Health Nurse
Healthy Start Program
CCRMC
For her leadership and the positive attitude she brings to patients and staff.
—Nominated by Healthy Start Staff

Drs. Judy Bliss, Cindy Carmichael, Ann Harvey and Paul Sarvasy
West County Physicians
For being outstanding and exemplary doctors and for their dedication, skills, professionalism, and endless hours of caring for clients, providing and coordinating care to help patients achieve optimal health. It has been an honor to work with them the past 10 years.
—Nominated by Jody Adelberg

Zenaida dos Santos
Clerk-Senior Level
CCRMC Clinical Lab
For saving CCHS approximately $20,000 by painstakingly taking time to go through every page of voluminous invoices, making sure the vendor’s billings are accurate and legitimate. Her dedication is unequalled.
—Nominated by Beth Balita

Dr. Steve Daniels
Pittsburg Health Center
For creating and overseeing the bimonthly Contra Costa Times “Healthy Outlook” column, providing fresh ideas, rigorous editing and often writing informative and interesting columns.
—Nominated by Bill Walker

Kate Fowlie
Health Educator
Communications Unit
For developing, coordinating and presenting Call Handler training for nearly 50 Public Health staff who will be activated during an emergency.
—Nominated by Julie Freestone

Employee Milestones
Congratulations to these employees who have given us long years of service: Susan Biunno, Lacey Friedman, Jacqueline Vargas, Ann-Marie Brown, Marilyn McClain, Judy Nichols, Wallace Posner (10 years); Stephanie Solar, Katherine Lorthridge, Rhonda Barksdale, Jack Rosenfeld, Edward Krebs (15 years); Adila Araya, Carol Fishel, Terrie Kent, Teresa McGowan, Judith Lee (20 years); Elaine Seawell, Anne Annis, Anita Martinez, Pamela Gosling (25 years); Everlita Dwinell, Richard Stickney, Roberta Stern and Bobbie Williams (30 years).
Ad Campaign Promotes Flu Shots for African-Americans

Flu vaccine is still available throughout the county, and national statistics show that African-American toddlers and adults alike are less likely to be vaccinated against a variety of diseases including influenza. Studies in both 2002 and 2004 showed African-American seniors 65 and older were 30% less likely to receive the flu shot than non-Hispanic whites of the same age. Consequently, our Public Health Division joined with Contra Costa Television and County Supervisor Federal Glover to tape a public service announcement promoting flu vaccine to be shown on our website (cchealth.org), CCTV and other TV stations this winter. Flu season often peaks in February, so getting your flu vaccine now will protect you for the holidays and beyond, and CCHS employees have the option of the shot or the nasal spray.

Flu clinic schedules are available for community members at cchealth.org and for employees on iSite, our intranet.

Reducing Health Disparities

CCHP Trains Staff in Cultural Competent Customer Service

As part of CCHS’ Reducing Health Disparities Initiative, Contra Costa Health Plan’s Executive Council approved extensive training in Culturally Competent Customer Service. This innovative program consisted of two modules of training for more than 120 employees with an interactive curriculum developed by Jeanne Walker Johnson, Education and Training Specialist at Contra Costa Regional Medical Center. The training facilitators – Marketing Manager Tracy Ann Jones, Sales and Outreach Manager Wendy Mailer and RHDI Education Committee member Otilia Tiutin – were extremely pleased with the results, which were achieved with help from support staff Matthew Celis and Giselle Bauge. Staff rated the training at the highest level and expressed desire for continued trainings. The curriculum addressed health disparities, differences in culture, race and lifestyles, and effective methods of communication.

For more information about training in CCHP, contact Tess O’Riva at toriva@bsd.cccounty.us or 925-313-6967.

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Contra Costa for Every Generation Marches On

The Contra Costa for Every Generation (CCEG) coalition continues to press forward on a half dozen initiatives designed with its motto of “Making Our Community Aging-Friendly” in mind. The group was formed in 2004 by volunteers and representatives from a large group of community organizations and county departments. At its quarterly meeting November 9 at the Pittsburg Senior Center, Initiative Group leaders reported on recent accomplishments and goals for the initiatives: health and wellness, housing, involvement in the community, neighborhood quality of life, support services and transportation. CCHS was represented at the recent meeting by Deborah Card and Dan Smith. CCEG has and is recruiting ambassadors to engage in community advocacy and will hire experts in the field to train the ambassadors in 2007. The group also plans to apply for non-profit status next year.

For more information about CCEG visit www.foreverygeneration.org or call County Employment and Human Services at 925-335-8700 and ask for Kitty Barnes or Mickey Sherman.

Dental Program Putting ‘Magic in Your Smile’ with New Presentation

The Dental Program is employing its powers of prestidigitation in this year’s Save Our Smiles program, which has its theme “There’s Magic in Your Smile.” The staff will be performing a stage show at approximately 50 elementary schools throughout the county beginning in January. The program will use simple magic tricks and illusions to illustrate oral health and nutrition concepts in a fun and entertaining format. Children also receive oral hygiene supplies, a dental screening and referral resources.

For more information, contact the Children’s Oral Health Program staff at (925) 313-6280.

Board of Supervisors, Mark DeSaulnier Saluted by Tobacco Prevention Coalition

The Contra Costa County Tobacco Prevention Coalition and the California Clean Air Project (CCAP) are teaming up to honor the County Board of Supervisors and Supervisor Mark DeSaulnier in particular. They are scheduled to present CCAP’s Public Leadership Award to both at the December 12 board meeting. The Board is being recognized for passing a secondhand smoke protections ordinance last month, and Supervisor DeSaulnier for his long-term commitment to tobacco control dating back to 1991.

For more information about the Tobacco Prevention Coalition, visit cchealth.org and click on Health Topics, then Tobacco Prevention, or call 925-313-6214.

Some Proposals for Mental Health Services Accepted, More Still Sought

Our Mental Health Division has been busy the past two months receiving and processing responses to three Requests for Proposals (RFP) it issued for new services funded through the Mental Health Services Act, or Prop. 63. Following a review process, the contract for new children’s mental health services in Far East County was awarded to Familias Unidas, which is partnering with Asian Pacific Psychological Services and New Connections. Contracts for services to Transition Age Youth and Adults in West County will be announced soon. Mental Health is also working with the Community Development Department to issue an RFP for up to $1.5 million in funds for one-time “bricks and mortar” housing costs for permanent supportive housing.

Keep up with the latest on the Mental Health Services Act by visiting http://cchealth.org/services/mental_health/prop63/ and clicking on “Did You Know That.”
**Big Hairy Audacious Goal at CCRMC**

A Big Hairy Audacious Goal isn’t a term you’ll read about in a medical text, but it’s how Dr. Steve Tremain and Anna Roth, leaders of CCRMC/HC Systems Redesign Unit, describe efforts to improve and enhance operations. It started more than a year ago when CCRMC/HC embraced the national 100,000 Lives Campaign and was named a Mentor Hospital by the Institute for Healthcare Improvements for dramatic improvements achieved in medication reconciliation. In the past year, besides improving medication reconciliation and five other areas, knowledge experts have been developed at many levels to lead the change and share knowledge. Although these initiatives can start with one resident, one patient and one doctor, they are spreading throughout the Division. Two new areas to get aboard include a Perinatal Care Impact Team with nursing leaders Margee Dean and Michelle Bushong plus Drs. Charlie Berletti and Francine Jolton. The new Office Practice Impact Team includes Dr. Ken Katzman, Dr. Ken Saffier and Dianne Dunn-Bowie. Besides being named a mentor hospital, the redesign effort has recently gotten recognition from the Blue Cross Foundation of California and Nursing Management magazine as well as receiving the 2006 California Association of Public Hospitals Management Excellence “Top Honors.”

For more information, call Steve Tremain at 925-370-5122 or Anna Roth at 925-370-5200, ext. 4576.

**Call Center, DOC Activated for Statewide Disaster Drill**

A number of CCHS employees were activated as disaster service workers November 15 and 16 as part of the annual statewide Golden Guardian Drill. This year’s exercise featured a 7.8 earthquake in the Bay Area. CCHS’ Department Operations Center (DOC) on Arnold Drive was activated along with the County Emergency Operations Center (EOC) at the Sheriff’s Office on Glacier Drive. Representatives from many different CCHS divisions worked at both the DOC and the County’s EOC. At the EOC, which was activated for 24 hours, CCHS staff helped manage disaster response and also worked in the County’s Public Information Center, where press releases were produced and news conferences were conducted. The County’s new Emergency Information Call Center also was successfully tested for the first time. About 43 Public Health employees were trained as Call Handlers before the drill by Julie Freestone and Kate Fowlie of our Community Education and Information Unit. Many answered simulated calls from the public during the drill. To see pictures from the drill, visit iSite, our Intranet, by typing cchs in your computer browser.

**Food Drive Runs Through December 22**

The “Contra Costa County Cares” holiday food drive is on, as county employees here and in Solano County are opening their pantries and checkbooks to feed the hungry this season. Also dubbed “Holiday Food Fight 2006” by the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano, the drive pits county against county and department against department in a friendly competition for a compassionate cause. The drive started November 20 and runs through December 22. The Food Bank serves 54,000 Contra Costa residents and 28,000 in Solano County every month, and about three-fourths of them run out of food and lack the money or resources to get it. Food can be delivered to the Food Bank at 4010 Nelson Avenue in Concord, but even small monetary donations are six times as effective in feeding people because of greater efficiency.

For more information about the food drive, go online and visit iSite, our Intranet, to see whom the drive coordinator for your division is, or call the Food Bank at 925-678-7543.