Good News on All Fronts

It's always a good feeling when I have pleasant news to share with you. For starters, for the first time in recent memory, it looks like the county budget will be balanced for the coming year. That means no layoffs or budget reductions. In fact, we might even have the opportunity to address some important issues that have gotten sidelined during the past years of painful budget cuts.

Just a caution about this: We can't declare a total victory as far as the county budget is concerned, because the issue of funding retiree health benefits looms large in the future. Unlike many counties in California, we have a much higher burden for many more employees, and strategies for addressing the funding gap will have to be considered in the near future.

More good news

Another very gratifying achievement is an agreement reached recently among 21 hospitals through a process I have been chairing. I told you some time ago that the federal government modified the way in which it would provide funding to public hospitals for the uninsured. They created a common pot of money and forced us to compete against each other for reduced funding. Thanks to a formula worked out by the California hospitals group, there should be no county drastically impacted by the new approach and we won’t lose more than our appropriate share of the funding.

An exciting new program

Another extremely exciting piece of news is the award we just received from the California Department of Health Services – nearly $46 million in total over the next three years – to expand our Basic Health Care program. The new Health Care Initiative (HCI) funding means we will be able to offer coverage to as many as 12,000 more low-income Contra Costa residents who currently have no health insurance.

We were among 17 counties competing for the funding and one of 10 to receive it. The state held its press conference announcing the awards at the Contra Costa Regional Medical Center, and both State Senator Tom Torlakson and Assemblyman Mark DeSaulnier were on hand to hear the news and point out publicly that they are long-time members of our Health Plan.

The Department of Health Services didn’t just provide funding. They also described their vision for the services that will be provided to new members: outreach to let residents know about the new coverage, preventive care, case and care management, a primary care physician for each enrollee and more.

Why We’re Ready

We are in an excellent position to meet the requirements and more. The lynchpin of HCI will be the Contra Costa Health Plan (CCHP), which “wrote the book” on how to operate a publicly funded health maintenance organization. CCHP, with almost 70,000 members enrolled, will offer new members access to CCRMC and our Health Centers as well as a Community Provider Network that includes 81 primary care physicians, 290 specialists and three community clinics. Our proven enrollment, management and delivery systems used for the Basic Health Care program will help us implement HCI quickly and effectively.

I feel the state’s award to us is recognition of the efforts we began in 1983 when the state removed medically indigent adults from MediCal and made them the responsibility of the counties – with half the funding. Our Board of Supervisors supported our effort to build BHC and expand it to a broader group over
Director’s Message Continued...

the years. The HCI award acknowledges our experience and dedication to the issue of providing care to all those who need it. It recognizes our ability to produce results.

Everyone needs to help

At the press conference announcing the awards, Senator Torlakson highlighted our pioneering efforts in the area of prevention, saying that during his tenure on the Board of Supervisors, he learned everything he knows about prevention. Assemblyman DeSaulnier said, “The health crisis can be solved by innovative ideas and people who care about high quality services – that requires innovation and partnerships.”

I agree with the need for partnerships. Once the full implementation process – which began last month and is expected to last 90 days – is complete, I will be asking everyone to help get the word out to low-income community members.

One of the very strong points in our grant application was that we are a comprehensive, integrated public health care system including CCRMC; eight family practice-based Health Centers providing more than 400,000 patient visits annually; an extensive network of mental health and substance abuse providers; an array of public health outreach, education and disease management programs; and CCHP. We hope to draw on the expertise of all of you to do outreach for HCI and provide high quality services to our new members.

We also have a long history of working with networks and community agencies to increase health coverage and health access and we are counting on our partners to help in this very worthwhile effort.

Please share with me any thoughts about HCI and how to make it as innovative and effective as possible.

Sincerely,

William Walker, MD

Department Website Reaches One Million Visits

The Health Services website, cchealth.org, now receives between 95,000 and 105,000 visits from the public every month. The site features more than 2,300 links, and reached a major milestone when there were over a million external visits in 2006. The growing popularity of the site is a result of the rich variety of information available. It reflects a tremendous level of public interest in the work of our divisions. While information about the CCRMC and Health Centers is most popular, each division is strongly represented on the website. Particular features on the site have attracted a niche audience. For example, two pandemic flu planning kits — one for schools, one for child care providers — have drawn over 30,000 visits to date. The Food Facility Inspection Search on the Environmental Health section has been based on 11,000 people. Pages devoted to issues like MRSA (a dangerous infection), avian flu, West Nile Virus, lead contamination, and the Family Practice Residency Program remain near the top of the site rankings. Over 196,000 people used search engines to find our site — the most commonly searched term being the Industrial Safety Ordinance.

For more information, call Shawn Eyer at 925-313-6114.

Employee Milestones

Congratulations to these employees who have given us long years of service: Michelle R. Lembeck, Raquel M. Gomes, Agnes T. Vinluan, Estelle C. Hellums, Rhonda J. Garner, Marybeth Ruiz, Vera J. Ash, Sara P. Fitts, Robert J. Thomas (10 years); Bienvenido F. Marcelino, James G. Koll, Deanna S. Bologna, William C. Alejandro, Pamela Witherspoon, Karen L. Baker, Louise M. Jones, Peter A. Del Fiorentino, Maria C. Cuevas (15 years); Dena C. Hutchin, Sakhi Ghaznawi, Doris Kumi, Jeff L. Wanger, Comfort E. Nwamuo, Yvonne M. McKeown (20 years); Sandra Mesa (25 years); and Sharmon Wong (30 years).

The Director's Report is published monthly. Deadline for the June edition is May 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

Padmini Parthasarathy
Senior Health Education Specialist
Family, Maternal and Child Health

For her attention to detail and countless hours researching, writing and editing the Children’s Oral Health Report -- “Healthy Teeth for Life” -- which gives a voice to the silent epidemic of dental disease.

—Nominated by Lorena Martinez-Ochoa and Lynn Pilant

Marlena Hartley
Administrative Services Assistant II
AIDS Program

For going the extra mile for the AIDS Program by working to coordinate the movers, painters, carpet layers and staff in providing a wonderfully smooth transition in our office.

—Nominated by Bud Getty and AIDS Program Staff

Josafina Ramos
Nutritionist
Public Health

For all her hard work throughout the years at the Richmond WIC office and for unending dedication to provide electric breast pumps and breastfeeding education to our premature moms.

—Nominated by Jeanne Conboy

Denise Keller-Stepp, RNC
CCHP Advice Nurse

For assuming responsibility for the Advice Nurse Unit while the manager was on leave and being cheerful, helpful and supportive throughout some very stressful periods.

—Nominated by Mary Knodt

Leticia Espinoza
Martinez Health Center Registration

For willingly and voluntarily offering to assist the Martinez Health Center Registration team during times of staffing shortages.

—Nominated by Ed Gibson

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.
As part of our Reducing Health Disparities Initiative (RHDI), our divisions are 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. Each month, this page highlights what CCHS is doing to address health disparities and what still needs to be done.

Reducing Health Disparities

Addressing Health Disparities in the African-American Community

What’s the problem

It is nationally and locally recognized that the African-American community is severely impacted by health disparities. In May 2005, the Community Health Indicators Report (CHIR) compiled by our Community Health Assessment, Planning and Evaluation Unit showed that African-Americans in Contra Costa die at disproportionately high rates from preventable diseases, contributing to major public health problems in our county. When compared to the county as a whole:

❖ African-Americans are more likely to die from cancer. Prostate cancer has the largest disparity for African-American men, who are nearly three times as likely to die from this type of cancer.
❖ African-Americans are three times more likely to die from diabetes.
❖ African-American men are seven times more likely to be diagnosed with AIDS, and the rate of AIDS cases for African-American women is on the rise.
❖ African-American women are twice as likely to give birth to low birth weight infants.
❖ African-American children are almost five times more likely to be hospitalized for asthma.

Homicide, obesity and stroke are other issues that impact the African-American community at disproportionately high rates.
Birth of the African-American Health Initiative

Fifteen of our staff attended the “African-American Health Summit: Embracing Wellness, Mind, Body and Spirit,” sponsored by the Bay Area Black United Fund two years ago. The Summit discussed the urgent need to address the continuing health crisis facing the African-American community. Following the Summit, CCHS Director Dr. William Walker convened those who attended. After several meetings and using CHIR data, other staff were asked to join the group and the African-American Health Initiative (AAHI) Planning Group was born. The AAHI Planning Group is facilitated by RHDI staff and includes two dozen CCHS employees from seven divisions. The Planning Group worked to develop a vision and mission, guiding principles, action steps and recommended strategies to improve partnerships with the African-American community.

A Call to Action

The AAHI Planning Group conducted a review of our services and agreed that a “Call to Action” is needed. They stress that any efforts to reduce health disparities in the African-American community must recognize the relationship between culture, history and health outcomes. It requires a delivery system that addresses the “whole person” — mind, body and spirit — and engages the community in planning solutions. The AAHI Planning Group made six recommendations:

- Establish the AAHI as a formal and permanent part of RHDI that would serve as a model to use with other impacted ethnic groups in our county
- Establish a partnership with the African-American community to hear what their priorities are and what intervention strategies they suggest
- Identify measurable health issues and create services that address those issues
- Implement internal systems changes that include recruiting African-Americans in leadership and middle-management positions
- Incorporate AAHI concerns into cultural competence trainings for staff
- Develop monitoring and evaluation components to AAHI programs and training

Read the Planning Group’s Recommendations on iSite, the CCHS intranet (type cchs in your browser address from a department computer).

Bay Point Health Conductors Work in the Community

Our Health Conductors in Bay Point are another strategy we are using to address health disparities in the African-American community. This project is modeled after the Black United Fund Conductor project, which focuses on having individuals make a personal commitment to promote health and wellness in their own lives, among family members and within the African-American community. Conductors Evelyn Dodson and Leandra Turner work closely with African-American professionals who provide one-on-one mentoring, varying in experience and expertise and include many of our fellow staff members. The conductors are working to hear from African-American residents about what their health education interests are, helping African-Americans navigate our healthcare system and raising community awareness in the African-American community about the health disparities they face.
Pandemic Flu Tabletop Draws Many Partners

Our Public Health Division held a Pandemic Influenza Tabletop last month that drew nearly 100 representatives from local hospitals, first responder and county agencies, schools, businesses and community groups. The purpose of the exercise was to explore how agencies would communicate during an ever-worsening outbreak. Participants heard about the methods CCHS uses to communicate health information. Ways to improve how CCHS will get health recommendations out during different stages of a pandemic were discussed and participants provided valuable feedback. The tabletop was the first of several that will be held as part of our continuing planning efforts to respond to a pandemic. The event was organized by our Health Emergency Response/Pandemic Flu Coordinator Kim Cox and her team: Kristina Spurgeon, Emergency Management Coordinator with John Muir Health, and Kate Fowlie in our Community Education and Information Unit.

Visit ISite to see more photos from the tabletop. For more information on our pandemic flu planning, visit the CCHS website at cchealth.org or contact Kim Cox at 925-313-6648.

Sunset for the Purple Form

Until now, if you wanted to set up a new Lotus Notes user or needed access to CCHS software systems like Meditech, Keane/Patcom, QicLink, etc., you had to fill out a paper form (widely known as the “purple form” because it was often printed on purple paper). Although in recent years this form has been available on iSite (the CCHS intranet), it was still necessary to print out a copy, fill it out on paper, and send the piece of paper – bearing your supervisor’s signature – through interoffice mail (faxes were not accepted) to Information Systems (IS). Starting last month, IS began to roll out a streamlined approach that will eventually eliminate the need for paper. The Mental Health Division has already “gone live,” submitting all requests through iSite, and CCRMC/HC and the Health Plan are in the process of doing so. The remaining divisions will go live as supervisors are trained in filling out and approving the electronic forms.

Contact Shahrzad Klingner at 925-313-6961 or email klingne@hsd.cccounty.us for more information or to arrange training for supervisors.

CCHP Flips Hotcakes for Diabetes Association

Dag Richards, IS chef supreme, cooks at the Contra Costa Health Plan’s recent pancake breakfast. The event was a joint fundraiser with the Employment and Human Services Department for the American Diabetes Association.

Our EMS Director Art Latrop was one of almost 100 tabletop participants.
Two Trainings in Mental Health, One Next Month

Mental Health staff have just completed one training and are preparing to host another in June. In partnership with the Crisis Center and the American Association of Suicidology and the Suicide Prevention Resource Center, the Division is offering a one-day training June 21 on “Assessing and Managing Suicide Risk.” The workshop for mental health professionals focuses on assessing suicide risk, planning treatment and managing the ongoing care of the at-risk client. It is presented by M. David Russ, PhD, ABPP, Chair of Psychology Department, Texas Tech University. The Division also offered a training last month on “Critical Incident Stress Management: Group Crisis Intervention.” This course provided an overview of Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) interventions with the community and emergency service workers following distressing events and bioterrorism. CISM is an integrated, comprehensive, multi-component, organized approach for the reduction and control of the harmful aspects of stress in emergency service workers and community members following terrorism.

To be included on an email list for the Suicide Risk training, email your address to susiem@crisis-center.org

New Article Describes Successes of Photovoice

Our Family, Maternal and Child Health (FMCH) Program Manager Cheri Pies and FMCH Senior Health Education Specialist Padmini Parthasarathy have published a new article describing how local health departments can use an innovative and engaging technique called Photovoice to supplement their quantitative data and gain a community perspective on health concerns. The article describes a number of our programs — including the TeenAge Program, Alcohol and Other Drugs Services, and the Tobacco Prevention Project — that have used the technique to involve Contra Costa residents in program planning efforts.

For more information, contact Cheri Pies at 925-313-5254. The Photovoice article is available online at cchealth.org

Column Reports that Kidney Disease is Underdiagnosed

Dr. Oliver Graham, co-director of our Chronic Kidney Disease Clinic at CCRMC, wrote about kidney disease in the “Healthy Outlook” column published last month in the Contra Costa Times. He pointed out that by the time patients come to our clinic, they’re usually quite sick and likely to become permanently disabled. It doesn’t always have to be that way though. The article describes kidney disease (also called “renal failure” or “renal insufficiency”) as one of the most underrecognized and underdiagnosed chronic diseases. Some 60-80% of people with significant kidney disease don’t know they have it. The illness usually doesn’t cause symptoms until it has become irreversible. Unfortunately, the current rise in obesity is causing an increase in both high blood pressure and diabetes — common causes of kidney disease. And, our aging population’s increasing use of over-the-counter painkillers to treat arthritis and other inflammatory conditions also leads to worsening kidney function.

For the full column about what kidney disease is, who is at risk and how it can be prevented and treated, go to Items of Interest, Healthy Outlook on the home page of cchealth.org

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Dr. Oliver Graham
Ednah Friedman Retires from Conservatorship Program

Ednah Beth Friedman, Program Manager of our Conservatorship/Guardianship Program, has retired after 35 years with the County. During her tenure, she's handled property ranging from personal jewelry to buried safes, stuffed wild animals, gold bullion and more. After earning a B.A. from the University of California, Berkeley, Ednah worked briefly for the Alameda County “welfare” department and as a file clerk for the U.S. Bankruptcy Court – a job which helped her when she was hired as a Deputy in what was then the County's Social Services Department. In 1981, the function was transferred to the Health Department. In 1985, Ednah was appointed Properties Trust Officer and promoted in 1995 to Program Manager. The operation now has 16 staff responsible for securing psychiatric and/or medical care and complete or partial fiscal oversight for more than 500 county residents. Ednah says she has always loved being able to deal with “the whole person,” interacting with myriad programs and agencies to access services on behalf of consumers. Through the years, even as faces have changed, Ednah says the staff has always been dedicated to helping the most fragile and vulnerable residents. “Their constancy and strength have made my tenure easy.” She will stay on to help make the transition to a new program manager.

EMS Spearheading Cardiac Improvement Efforts

Our Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Division is spearheading an effort to improve the care of patients with heart attacks. Dr. Joseph Barger, EMS Medical Director, is working with local cardiologists and hospitals to establish a system that directs heart attack victims to centers that offer advanced cardiac care. By use of a 12-lead electrocardiogram (ECG) by paramedics, hospitals can also be notified in advance of the patient's condition, which helps to accelerate the care of these patients by allowing advanced preparation by the hospital. Use of prehospital ECGs can speed care by up to 30 minutes, which is an important factor in survival and recovery from a heart attack. “This is an important advance in emergency cardiac care. We hope to improve the outcomes of patients throughout the county,” Dr. Barger said.

Haz Mat Helps Honor Green Businesses at Board Meeting

The Board of Supervisors recognized 60 Contra Costa businesses April 24 for being “green.” The Green Business Program, which is run out of our Hazardous Materials Division, certifies businesses for meeting specific standards to conserve energy, water and other resources, reduce waste, and prevent pollution. The full listing of Green Businesses can be found at www.greenbiz.ca.gov. “You've been great on this program,” said Supervisor John Gioia of Robin Bedell-Waite before introducing the awardees from his district. Robin told her fellow steering committee members and the businesses, “I am very proud to work on this with you.” Also on April 24, all of the environmental programs operated by the county, including our Hazardous Materials and Environmental Health divisions, had displays in the lobby outside the Board Chambers to honor National County Government Week’s “Protecting the Environment” theme.

For more information on Green Business, visit www.greenbiz.ca.gov or call Robin Bedell-Waite in our Hazardous Materials Division at 925-646-2286.