Staying Healthy

Having spent the last year engaged in fairly high level discussions about health reform in California – and having been disappointed by the lack of progress in that area – it strikes me now that very little of the conversation was really about health.

Most of us recognize that having health insurance and access to quality care and state-of-the-art medical treatment are extremely important for a person's well being. Yet those factors probably contribute less than 50% to a person's health status.

Since we’ve failed so far in this state to move forward with the half of the equation that deals with access to care, it is important that we look at the other factors and consider what impact we can have on them. I hope that in the upcoming presidential campaign there will be thoughtful discussions both about how we are going to pay for health insurance for everyone and also about the broader issues that contribute to health and how we are going to promote a healthier society.

On a personal level

It is obviously important for us to pay attention to those activities of daily living that contribute to our wellness: not smoking, not drinking an excess of alcohol, getting regular exercise and eating a healthy diet.

In my own life, as I’m now over 60, I know that mountain bike riding, eating healthy, living a stress-free life and getting the right amount of rest contribute to how healthy I am. That statement makes people who know me smile because being the leader of a public health system at this time isn’t conducive to a stress-free life. And being the Health Officer on-call often means I get less rest than I should. Even though most of us can’t live a stress-free life, we can learn how to deal with stress in ways that are not harmful to our health.

With my patients

In my ongoing family practice, I spend a lot more time talking to my patients about exercise, diet and healthy living than I did in the early part of my career. In those days, we physicians tended more to solutions: here’s a prescription that can fix you, here’s a surgery procedure that can make you better. There’s been a major change in the practice of medicine with the emphasis on preventive care. That’s been noticeable in teaching, conferences and the literature. In our own Family Medicine program, we’ve changed the curriculum to reflect this and to include community-focused interventions that emphasize the role of healthy communities and policy initiatives.

These prevention messages should not just be delivered in a doctor’s office. They should be a part of the education for our children, advertising and messaging, and employers’ commitment to their workers. We are seeing more awareness about the role the workplace plays in supporting healthy behavior. Silicon Valley companies have set a great example by providing access to exercise and fresh fruits and vegetables. The County does it promoting weight loss programs and walking. The Board of Supervisors recently took action to encourage the use of locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables.

A new model for health care

Another aspect of changing physician practices is the new emphasis on providing patients with a medical home with team-based care. This new approach ensures that a patient’s

Continued next page
interaction is not only with the physician but also with nurses, health educators, mental health professionals and navigators who can assist in the challenging journey through the health care system and with efforts to improve health.

We have begun some of that with our group visits and multi-disciplinary approach for diabetes, our African American Health Conductors and Promotoras, Patient Navigators for breast cancer treatment and the Child Health and Disability Prevention program’s use of Community Health Workers to educate patients and families about obesity.

**Beyond the individual**

These new strategies all recognize there is much more to effective health care than writing a prescription. We also know there is much more to healthy people and healthy communities than health care.

As a health department, we have responsibility for not only individual patients and clients but also the broader health of the community. We’re beginning to understand the obstacles that many of our communities face daily in meeting their basic health needs. Our recent efforts promoting the Public Broadcasting System’s *Unnatural Causes* documentary were aimed at raising awareness about the role education, employment, community and socioeconomic level play in health status.

If it’s unsafe to walk or exercise, if there’s no access to fresh fruits and vegetables, if there is street violence in the community, then there are few prescriptions that will fix that.

To improve the health of our communities, we have to deliver quality care and also be outside out health centers, interacting with other agencies whose activities also impact health.

We have to overcome obstacles – chain restaurants not wanting to post their food content and calories, corporations that depend on subsidies for unhealthy lunches for schools kids, tobacco companies that profit from selling products that surely kill people. A piece of keeping us alive and well will be a reform in health insurance. A larger piece will be addressing the broader issues.

We are one part of a complex picture but we can play a valuable role as a catalyst for change. We have done that in advocating for smoke-free workplaces, food labeling, and city planning that acknowledges health issues.

And as individuals, most of us know we have responsibility for our own individual health-promoting activities, but that won’t be enough. We have to be responsible community members and raise our voices for change. At the end of the day, it’s a political process and it means having leaders who share the vision for how to support healthy communities and healthy people.

Sincerely,

William B. Walker, MD

**Milestones**

Congratulations to these employees who have given us long years of service: Jamie Holgerson, Cristina M. Perez, Marilyn C. Wilts, Susan J. Martini, Nagozi U. Emenalom, Lorena Martinez-Ochoa, Cynthia J. Savage, Claude D. Visak, Theresa L. Nino, Eva Z. Vera, Theresa B. Ronquillo (10 years); Beverly L. Frazier, Steve Berry, Francine Jolton (15 years); Mary Smith, Jesus Unpingco, Linda M. Estrada-Reyes, David Stone (20 years); Elizabeth V. Llewellyn, Wanda Session, Rosario Julia Gordovez, Marian Bick, Jeanette M. Braker (25 years); Kathryn Shima (30 years).

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.cccounty.us or fax it to 925-957-5401. The form can also be downloaded from the Internet (About Us page) or iSITE, our intranet. Nominations are subject to approval by Division Directors.

The next Director's Report will be a combined August/September issue. The deadline for submitting stories is July 30. Publicize your upcoming events and successes by sending information to Dan Smith at 597 Center Avenue, Suite 255, Martinez 94553, fax 925-313-6219, email: dsmith@hsd.cccounty.us The Director's Report is available online at cchealth.org and on iSITE, our intranet, at cchs.
For providing Continuing Education Credits to Public Health Nurses as part of the Professional Standards and Practice Committee, helping to expand PHNs’ knowledge on an array of nursing topics and about community resources that can be shared and utilized by clients and patients.

—Nominated by Yodeillie Baybayan

For being available on a Saturday if any problems were encountered using scanning equipment or new archival software. What a comfort knowing there was someone to call.

—Nominated by Lory Lease

For consistently providing coverage and taking on extra loads of charts for prescriptions and messages, and for always putting the patients’ needs first without complaining about the workload.

—Nominated by Donna Marie Page

For their professionalism, thoroughness and compassion. You are lucky to have them in your employment.

—Nominated by a patient

For nearly two decades of dedication to improving the lives of Contra Costa residents and for working in collaboration with the community and many Health Services programs to improve service delivery, responsiveness and community health.

—Nominated by Dr. Wendel Brunner

For his advocacy and education work with the City of Richmond regarding adult homelessness, which resulted in additional funding for shelters.

—Nominated by Cynthia Belon
Hazardous Materials Division Focusing on Community Awareness

This year, our Hazardous Materials Division continues to take the lead in raising community awareness about environmental impact issues. HazMat is responsible for responding to emergencies and monitoring hazardous materials. Their efforts related to Reducing Health Disparities include:

- Identify a staff person to lead and assist with the coordination of HazMat Reducing Health Disparities activities (see separate story)
- Create a community brochure to help the public know who to call about an environmental hazard concern
- Explore the creation of regional maps to identify location of chemical companies and the chemicals they handle
- Conduct at least one staff education activity to enhance staff communication skills

The HazMat Division has been involved in risk reduction efforts for two decades, beginning in 1989 when they implemented the Risk Management and Prevention Program. This is a state program to reduce the possibility of an accidental chemical release that could impact the community. From 1990-1994, this program resulted in a 44% reduction of the quantity of dangerous chemicals produced and used in Contra Costa.

HazMat also worked with the regulated businesses and community members to present a worse-case scenario exercise in 1999. HazMat Chief Randy Sawyer says, “When residents are given important information such as what chemicals are created and used in their community, they can work with elected officials to make changes that can lead to better health outcomes.”

The County’s unique Industrial Safety Ordinance mandates outreach to involve the public in reviewing audits – conducted by HazMat staff – of local chemical plants and oil refineries. This provides another way for HazMat staff to be actively involved in an RHD goal: Engaging and partnering with the community and public entities.

HazMat Director Randy Sawyer (left) is pictured with Hazardous Materials Specialist Maria Duazo (front) and Accident Release Prevention Supervisor Cho Nai Cheung.
Unnatural Causes Sparks Commitment

Our Hazardous Materials Division staff recently viewed “Place Matters,” one of the segments of the Public Broadcasting System’s thought-provoking documentary series, Unnatural Causes – Is Inequality Making You Sick? The video prompted a lively dialogue and several staff members said they were deeply impacted. One – Greg Lawler, Hazardous Material Specialist II – has now become the Reducing Health Disparities point person for the HazMat Division. Why did Greg want to become more involved? HazMat Chief Randy Sawyer said, “Greg wanted to make a difference in the community he serves by looking at environmental justice issues and disparities from a HazMat perspective.”

All seven parts of the Unnatural Causes documentary are available for showing to staff or the community by contacting RHD’s Lauren Stoddard at email lstoddard@hsd.cccounty.us or 925-957-5422.

José Martín Retires

José Martín, Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, retired last month from his Reducing Health Disparities Language Services Manager position after 28 years of CCHS service. Before joining RHD in 2003 as the first RHD Manager, José worked in our Mental Health Division as a clinician, supervisor, clinic program manager and Administrative Programs Manager. He coordinated staff training, internship and diversity programs and chaired Mental Health’s ethics and research committee. He also co-chaired CCHS’ Diversity Advisory Committee and the Linguistic Access Committee. “José played an important role in launching our formal efforts to reduce health disparities and especially in launching our Health Care Interpreter Network,” said Dr. William Walker, CCHS Director.

New Equipment Arrives

The Contra Costa Regional Medical Center Auxiliary recently purchased several laptop computers and projectors for use by the Promotoras and Health Conductors from Bay Point Family Health Center. The components will be used on community health education and awareness activities. Posing with the new equipment are, from left, Maria Silva, Evelyn Dodson, Le’Andra Turner, Elsbeth Donavan, Elizabeth Luciano, Nuria Jovel, Doris Greene, Miriam Medina, Yolanda Castillo and Barbara Profe.
Staff Members Book Short, Shaky Stay in ‘Quake Cottage’
Several CCHS staff got all shook up recently, courtesy of the “Quake Cottage” at San Ramon Regional Medical Center. It is an educational tool owned by the U.S. Geological Service designed to teach health care workers how to prepare California hospitals for a major earthquake. The Quake Cottage, which is essentially a trailer mounted on a moving platform, simulates the shaking of an 8.0 magnitude earthquake. Once the shaking starts, riders discover they have nothing to grip onto but the handles next to their seats. The interior of the cottage is designed to look like a small office, with paintings on the wall, a file cabinet and fax machine. Everything that is not bolted down, including the fake knick-knacks on the shelf of the file cabinet, comes flying toward the riders. “It was more intense than I thought it would be,” Kathy Ellerby of Richmond Health Center told the Contra Costa Times. “And I can’t believe it was only 30 seconds. It felt longer.” Other staff at the demonstration included Emergency Preparedness Manager Dan Guerra and Clinic Coordinators Teresa Lascano, Waynette Mason and Sylvia Elizarraraz.

‘People Who Make A Difference’ Awards Given to Groups, Individuals
The Alcohol and Other Drugs Advisory Board gave out its annual People Who Make A Difference Awards on June 17 before the County Board of Supervisors. Ten awards and five Certificates of Merit were announced, including the following recipients: Chris Buerger, Amy Gillian, Marcella Gomez, Nadiri Jumoke, Renee Mencarelli, Ray Merritt, Tony Norris, the Rev. Felicia Permillian, Mark Ruppenthal, Shawn Wallace and Erin Wilson. Also honored were the Born Free Program, Friday Night Live at John Swett High School, the Juvenile Investigations Unit of the Probation Department, and the West County Alcohol Policy Working Group. David Robert Abar II was awarded posthumously.

For more information visit cchealth.org and click on Alcohol and Other Drug Services or call 925-313-6300.

Project Homeless Connect 3 Looking for Volunteers
Volunteers are being sought for Project Homeless Connect 3, which follows two very successful events in 2006 and 2007. Services were delivered to hundreds of people experiencing homelessness in Richmond and Concord at these events, and the site on September 10 is the county fairgrounds in Antioch. For that one day, volunteers will help homeless Contra Costa residents connect to benefits, medical care, substance abuse and mental health counseling, housing and other services. Some employees will be working the event as part of their regular assignments. Others are needed as greeters and to serve food, complete applications and more. All CCHS employees, with the approval of their supervisors, are encouraged to use their leave to volunteer for this very worthwhile event or to contribute financial support.

More information is available on our website at cchealth.org or by calling 925-313-6124.

Food Environments Found to Increase Obesity, Diabetes Rates
A well-publicized, recent report documented that where Californians live affects their risk of obesity and diabetes, and Contra Costa is among the top 10 high-risk counties in the state. The report by the California Center for Public Health Advocacy, PolicyLink and the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research is titled Designed for Disease: the Link Between Local Food Environments and Obesity and Diabetes. It ranks counties by a ratio of fast food and convenience stores to grocery stores, with San Bernardino County having the highest ratio and Marin County having the lowest, and it found correlations to rates for obesity and diabetes. Our Community Wellness & Prevention Program has found similar results in studying certain neighborhoods in Richmond and in Concord’s Monument Corridor, where surveys were conducted with the help of the West County Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) Collaborative and Monument Community Partnership.

The report is available at publichealthadvocacy.org and information about our Richmond area survey is available at cchealth.org by clicking on Public Health and then Snapshot of the Food Environment in West County. For more information, contact Tracey Rattray at trattray@hsd.ccourtys.us or 925-313-6835.
HazMat Business Program Celebrates 10 Years of Being Green
Contra Costa’s Green Business Program in our Hazardous Materials Division celebrated its first 10 years with a reception April 24 at Lindsay Wildlife Museum. Sometimes it’s not easy being green, but the program now has more than 300 businesses certified – all demonstrating environmental leadership and commitment. Each one takes concrete measures to prevent pollution, reduce waste and save energy and water. “Collectively the results are impressive,” said Robin Bedell-Waite, program manager. “For instance, we estimate that 300 Green Businesses replacing their old fluorescent lights with new, efficient ones save about 3 million KWh and 1.5 million pounds of CO2 emissions a year.” The celebration showcased these green successes in a video, honored early Green Business leaders, and featured speakers such as Assemblyman Mark DeSaulnier and Walnut Creek Mayor Gwen Regalia. The main message was to urge businesses to not only be green, but to tell the world they’re green.

Visit www.greenbiz.ca.gov for a list of Green Businesses and to see the video.

Free Tax Preparation Program Has Another Record Year
Earn It, Keep It, Save It (EKS), a Contra Costa partnership program, again helped a record-breaking number of hardworking low to moderate-income residents file taxes and receive their owed tax refunds. Staffed by volunteers, EKS helped 2,360 families and individuals receive more than a total of $2.7 million in tax refunds and credits for the 2007 tax season, compared to just over 2,000 families and $2.4 million for 2006. About 98 volunteers participated in the program, including eight CCHS employees: Mary Costa, Cristina Fernandez, Rosalia Cuevas, Cindy Downing, Tracy Hopkins, Lisa Quindor, Patricia Sanchez, Felicia Walls and Honga Wei. EKS is a project of the Family Economic Security Partnership, a public, private and nonprofit collaboration including CCHS, Contra Costa Employment and Human Services Department, Community Housing Development Corporation (CHDC) of North Richmond, United Way of the Bay Area, First Five Contra Costa, Internal Revenue Service and East Bay Community Foundation.

For information on next year’s EKS, contact Maria Benjamin, CHDC, at mbenjamin@chdcnr.com or 510-412-9290 ext. 21.

Column Covers Whooping Cough Outbreak, Importance of Vaccinations
Our Immunization Coordinator Erika Jenssen writes about how a recent whooping cough (pertussis) outbreak at a private school illustrates the importance of immunizations in a recent installment of our “Healthy Outlook” column, which runs in the Contra Costa Newspapers chain. More than 17 children at the school in El Sobrante fell ill with the highly infectious respiratory illness, which can be very dangerous in young children. The children are all recovering, but as the column points out, the outbreak could have been prevented if more of the students had been immunized. State law allows parents to choose to not immunize their children for personal or religious reasons, and the parents of more than half of the students opted not to immunize before the outbreak. Coincidentally, Erika’s own daughter attends this school, but fortunately she was immunized and didn’t become sick. In the column, Erika urges parents to get their children immunized and addresses some concerns about the safety of vaccinations.

To read more of this and other Healthy Outlook columns, visit cchealth.org and click on the Healthy Outlook link in Items of Interest or on the Publications page.
Emergency, Critical Care
Cook Up a Celebration
The Emergency Department and Critical Care Teams at Contra Costa Regional Medical Center recently celebrated improved care for our most seriously ill patients. Through hard work and coordination, waiting time in Emergency for a bed in the Intensive Care Unit has been reduced from 5 hours to about 3.5 hours, a 30% reduction. The teams celebrated this success May 14 with a barbecue. When asked what contributed to the win for the patients, team member comments included: “Better and more communication …The resident goes to the ICU to finish up orders …The ICU charge nurse comes over to the (Emergency) dept. to help out …Housekeeping getting beds ready for the pt. (patient)…” According to Lisa Massarweh, Chief Nursing Officer, even one Nuclear Medicine staff asked, “This is great...How can we help?”

High Demand for Environmental Health’s Pool Seminars
Our Environmental Health Division is responsible for inspecting approximately 1,600 public pools and spas in the county. That includes health clubs, municipal facilities, apartment and condo complexes, swim schools and swim clubs. This year, division staff offered a two-hour seminar to the operators of these facilities, pool service companies and contractors. The seminar covered safety and sanitation requirements, including real-life examples of illness and injury that have occurred from unsafe pools and spas. A flyer was sent out and response was overwhelming. Originally, three seminars were scheduled and they quickly filled up. To accommodate the demand for the class, staff had to schedule 10 seminars, limiting each to 30 participants. Improved operation of pools and spas is expected this summer as a result of the program.

Health Plan Commemorates Move with Suite Warming
Contra Costa Health Plan held a Suite Warming celebration June 12 to commemorate moving its Provider Relations, Contracts, and Analysis and Reporting units to Suite 110 at 1340 Arnold Drive in Martinez. The units moved from 597 Center Ave., which flooded last winter. A ribbon-cutting was conducted and tours of the Claims Unit were given. The new location, which was seven years in negotiations and planning, allows CCHP to expand its Case Management unit and Good Health program at 597 Center.

For more information contact Terri Lieder in Provider Relations at tlieder@bsd.cccounty.us or 925-313-9502.

For information about swimming pool sanitation, visit cchealth.org and click on Environmental Health, then FAQs, then Consumer Protection Recreational Health.