Looking for Ways to Cope

In last January’s Director’s Report, I talked about the likelihood that health reform might be approved at the state level — and my concern that the State budget shortfall could doom any chance of achieving health coverage for all residents. Unfortunately, that prediction proved to be true.

What I said in that message was that, because of budget deficits at the State and County levels, we would be looking at ways in which we could streamline operations here in Health Services. Now, with the deepening national financial crisis — and no matter who is elected president this month — we will have to redouble our efforts to control what we can locally to deal with the hard times that surely lie before us.

What we are facing

In an All Staff message last month regarding the stress and concerns all of us are experiencing about the country’s financial institutions and our own investments and benefits, I promised to describe in more detail what I see ahead for us.

It is clear to me that any national or even state efforts to create a system of health care that isn’t employer-based and that allows every resident access to quality care is far in the future. At the same time, with unemployment growing and jobs being lost, more and more people need our services. Our current system is already severely over capacity. We’re delivering 240-250 babies a month when CCRMC was built for 120. Our Emergency Department was designed for 18,000 visits a year and is handling 55,000.

How systems cope

In private health care systems, when demand exceeds capacity, the facilities expand, raise fees and cut costs. Public systems have much less flexibility, although over the years many of them — operated by counties like ours, or by hospital districts like Doctors Medical Center or universities — have found ways to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

In 1981, half of the members in the National Association of Public Hospitals, to which we belong, were county or city-owned hospitals. Today, fewer than 10% of them are structured that way. They’ve had to find new ways to govern these safety net facilities because of financial pressures, bureaucratic red tape and other factors. In the Bay Area, Alameda County created a Health Care Authority to provide more flexibility and financial stability. They’ve been able to increase revenue and productivity, improve personnel recruitment and retention, achieve new tax revenues and strengthen financial stability.

Exploring options

There are other models for how to govern hospitals to achieve these successes and our Board of Supervisors has directed us to explore all of them to see which, if any, would be good for us. We will be looking at the problems we face that drive up our costs, are considered red flags by our regulators, and interfere with patient safety and effective delivery of quality care.

We also are looking at a broad range of ways in which to make large-scale changes in our delivery models, something that is happening across the country and internationally in both the private and public health care sectors. Through our involvement
Director’s Message Continued...

with the Institute for Healthcare Improvement, we are examining options for primary care delivery redesign, new ways to approach chronic care management, economies of scale through collaboration with our partners and strategies for reducing emergency department utilization. You’ve read about some of them and we’ll be sharing more tests of change in coming months.

**Leadership is needed**

In the lead up to the U.S. presidential election, I have been very conscious lately about issues related to leadership during difficult periods. As the Director of Health Services — and a very involved member of the California Association of Public Hospitals and Health Systems and the National Association of Public Hospitals and Health Systems — I see clearly the need for strong and creative leadership on a federal, state and local level.

In the face of economic problems, health care reform has fallen to the bottom of the priority list. I hope the new administration in Washington puts the spotlight back on the issue. It will be more important than ever for all of us to get involved in making that happen. Meanwhile, I welcome your ideas about ways we can operate more effectively and efficiently.

Sincerely,

William B. Walker, MD

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**Employee Flu Clinics Offered**

County employees can receive flu shots or nasal spray vaccinations in downtown Martinez from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Tuesday, November 18 at 651 Pine Street, Room 108. Employee flu clinics also will be offered from 8 to 11 a.m. Friday mornings beginning November 14 at Vista Oaks Occupational Medicine, 10 Douglas Drive, Suite 110 in Martinez. The vaccinations are free for Contra Costa Health Plan members (bring your CCHP card) and $25 for others. The flu nasal spray vaccine is available to people who are healthy, not pregnant and under 50 years of age.

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**New Orientation Helps Incoming Medical Residents Connect**

A newly created employee orientation was well received by our newest class of medical residents. Titled “Connecting with Your New Environment,” the session serves as an introduction to CCHS. “We wanted to create something to welcome and assimilate recently graduated doctors into CCHS and provide a cultural orientation of who we are and how we work together,” said CCHS Personnel Analyst and trainer Fran Trant, who came up with the concept. As part of the orientation, Fran worked with Dr. Mitch Applegate, Director of Critical Care at CCRMC, and Carolyn Billings, Nurse Program Manager OR/PACU, to include a section on effectively collaborating and communicating as part of a medical team. The program also covered our commitment to reducing health disparities, along with the required Harassment Prevention and Disaster Service Worker training.

For more information on the new training, contact Fran Trant at ftrant@hsd.cccounty.us or 925-957-5245.
Free Exams Offered During Breast Cancer Awareness Month

As part of Breast Cancer Awareness Month in October, free breast exams were offered to uninsured women at three events held at our health centers in Martinez, Pittsburg and Richmond. Physicians, nurses, social workers, patient navigators and community cancer organizations were on hand to provide education, answer questions and offer support at the health fairs. CCHS staff volunteered their time to participate in the events, which were part of the efforts to raise awareness about breast cancer and to help women take a more active role in their breast health. The Board of Supervisors passed a resolution in recognition of Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

Youths RYSE Above Violence with New Center

The Richmond-based RYSE youth center celebrated its grand opening recently with CCHS Director Dr. William Walker, Supervisor John Gioia, Richmond Mayor Gayle McLaughlin, Police Chief Chris Magnus and hundreds of youths and community members. The event culminated several years of planning and visioning for the youth-directed program, which is supported by Health Services, Employment and Human Services and many other partners. The vision for the effort was conceived after four high school youths from Richmond were tragically killed. After a summit and survey, youths agreed they needed a safe, supportive place for activities and social interaction. RYSE will provide comprehensive program building on youth power, community health and transformation. The colorful building, painted by the RYSE leadership team, board members and others, is located at 41st and Bissell in Richmond.

For information, contact Julie Freestone at jfreestone@hsd.cccounty.us or 925-937-5438.

Healthy Outlook Column Covers ‘Crypto’ in Pools

One of our recent Healthy Outlook columns in the Contra Costa Times chain was written by our Environmental Health Director Sherman Quinlan about cryptosporidium, a parasitic pathogen that is resistant to chlorine and invisible to the naked eye. The Federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that 62% of all recreational water illness in the United States now comes from “crypto.” Cryptosporidiosis causes serious diarrhea and often stomach cramps, vomiting and fever. In immunocompromised individuals, such as AIDS and some cancer patients, it can cause permanent, life-threatening infections. For most healthy individuals, the best treatment is staying hydrated and waiting for the bug to pass.

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.
Reducing Health Disparities

Mental Health Recovery Model Values Diversity

Our Mental Health Division is using a unique approach to reducing health disparities, utilizing its Recovery Model as a basis for its efforts. The model—which incorporates principles of self-direction, person-centered, empowerment, holistic, non-linear, strengths-based, peer support, respect, responsibility and hope—acknowledges that “culture” is central to recovery. It recognizes and values consumers as experts, values diversity and local knowledge.

Vidya Iyengar, the Project Manager who oversees the reducing health disparities efforts for Mental Health says, “Prior to the Recovery Model, mental health patients were treated as marginalized people. Now, the clinician and the consumer, who is the expert, must work hand-in-hand on the journey to recovery.”

Vidya and the Division’s RHD team are using a six-pronged approach to create the infrastructure to enhance services and processes in linguistic access, workforce education & training, multicultural community partnerships, governance, data collection and work environment.

Their efforts include a rich array of activities: Planner and Evaluator Imo Momoh is developing a curriculum to give interpreters a better understanding of mental health issues. Imo, Vidya, Debra Jones, Mental Health Planner and Evaluator, and David Cassell, Quality Improvement Coordinator, are working with regional Mental Health clinic teams to identify health disparities and possible solutions to those disparities. The Central County Adult Clinic, for example, is exploring ways to identify Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender consumers and find ways of supporting them. After staff at the Concord Adult Mental Health Clinic identified underutilization of mental health services by Latinos as an issue, Imo began working to identify barriers for which the team will create solutions.

To support respect and positive relations between staff and consumers, the whole Division is developing Service Excellence principles and behavior expectations.

For more information, contact Vidya Iyengar at viyengar@hsd.cccounty.us or 925-957-5212.
A Vietnamese father who speaks limited English calls our Mental Health Access Line and tells the mental health counselor about his son’s problems and the issues tearing at the family’s heart. The Access Line Counselor asks questions respectfully and with sensitivity. Responding to the family’s mental health, language and cultural needs, the counselor links them with mental health referrals and community support.

Providing linguistic and culturally appropriate care is no easy task for a 24-hour phone access operation that responds to 100-150 calls a day, serving both Medi-Cal beneficiaries and the Contra Costa community as a whole. Mental Health counselors who speak English, Spanish and Tagalog are immediately accessible and, through an extensive community provider network, there is language capability for more than 30 languages.

Barbara Goldsmith, a counselor with the Access Line says, “Language is but one piece. We must also provide culturally competent care.”

Success of the unit is attributed to a team approach. The Access Line and the Care Management Unit includes Dr. Tony Sanders, Juanita Garrison, Maria Barsa, Diana Binney, Susan Childers, Judy Hoyt, Sandra Lopez, Elena Wagnon, Paolo Gargantiel, Barb Goldsmith, Susan Gore, Liz Jones, Shelley Okey and Carmen Zelaya.

As the population ages — by the year 2030, residents 60 years old and over will account for more than 20% of the Contra Costa population — disparities in health outcomes for older adults have become a reality.

Our new Mental Health Older Adult Care Services Unit is tackling the complex issues impacting older adults, such as isolation, mental health concerns with co-occurring medical programs that often lead to depression, suicidal thoughts, stigma and ageism.

Program Manager Cesar Court says that by providing linguistic access capacity, linkage and advocacy, outreach and care management through a community-based and client-centered model, his multi-disciplinary teams will help reduce health care barriers and address the stigma many older adults face when using mental health services.

The program has three community outreach teams with licensed clinicians Denise Chmiel, Holly Hand and Julie Weigel; community support workers Annette Shaw, Fred Taguiran and Jennifer Tuipulotu and nurse Martin Garro. Additional clinicians will be co-located at Health Centers, beginning with Ana Giron in Richmond, to provide depression screening and short-term therapy. They’ll be coordinating services with the primary care physician, client and family to improve outcomes.

Our Finance Division’s Contracts and Grants Unit celebrated diversity with a Pan Asian Feast on September 29. As part of the delicious event, staff prepared more than 13 dishes and appetizers from countries including Afghanistan, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand. See iSITE for a photo.
**Going the Extra Mile for Service Excellence**

** Honor Roll **

**Dr. Veda Bhatt**
*Martinez Health Center*

For focusing on patients' well-being as a whole, taking the time to truly listen, exploring alternatives to diagnosis and treatment and being a true patient advocate.

—Nominated by Cynthia Easton

**Rodney Chan, MD**
**Paul Kwok, MD**
*Contra Costa Regional Medical Center*

For being a superb team and for the great care and attention they provide during surgical procedures.

—Nominated by Laura Garcia

**Rene Galvez**
*Account Clerk – Advanced Level*
*Finance Division*

For consistently and graciously providing excellent service while saving the County thousands of dollars with his insightful ideas, sterling work ethic and willingness to put forth the time, effort and tenacity to see a problem through.

—Nominated by Pattie Lew

**Eva Lopez**
*Community Health Worker Specialist*
*Public Health Division*

For helping a patient get the medication he needed by walking him through the process of signing up for Basic Health Care.

—Nominated by Pat Hill

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**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 ServiceEX@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.

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**Milestones**

Congratulations to these employees who have given us long years of service: Patrick J. Maher, Jeffrey R. Boatright, Angela C. Guerra, Darlene R. Amell, Denice A. Dennis, Pranati Nandi, Angela M. Bennett, April N. Littleton (10 years); Guy M. Hardman, Bertha Knox, Janey Walker, Karl K. Norwood, Ann M. Leong, Toni K. McDonald, Yong Lee, Gregory A. Bento, Anne Lisenko, Judith A. Smith, Michele E. Garbers, Sharyn R. Owens (15 years); Stephanie R. Bailey, Phyllis Mace, Shelly L. Whalon, Livier A. Gonzalez, Cynthia A. Hellman-Wylie, Donna M. Mann, Katherine M. Servantes, Kalpana D. Ghiya, Tamera S. Rennaker (20 years); Margaret A. Harris, Derrell A. McKinney, Linda D. Hubbard, Sharee M. Sunfeather (25 years); Cesar B. Court, Patricia K. Moeller and Bruce M. Conroy (30 years).
GOING THE EXTRA MILE FOR SERVICE EXCELLENCE

Honor Roll

Jacqueline Pigg  
Contracts Administrator

Tasha Scott  
Assistant Contracts Administrator

Contracts & Grants Team  
Finance Division

For their positive, efficient, and effective approach and willingness to develop complex contracts with local hospitals in time to implement the Emergency Medical Services Division’s new STEMI (ST Elevation Myocardial Infarction) heart attack program.

—Nominated by Lauren Kovaleff

Ann Schnake, FNP  
Richmond Health Center

For inspiring the Quilt of Many Colors project and for the passion, commitment and dedication that has created ArtsChange, a dynamic organization that integrates art, health and social change.

—Nominated by William Walker, MD

Anne Wexler, MD  
Contra Costa Regional Medical Center

For being very supportive and proactive in dealing with a patient’s cancer and making the patient’s journey much easier.

—Nominated by a patient

CCRMC Receives California HealthCare Foundation Award

Contra Costa Regional Medical Center (CCRMC) has received the 2008 Leveraging Effectiveness, Advancing Practice (LEAP) Award from the California HealthCare Foundation for its innovative approach to expand access to specialty care to the underserved. CCRMC trains family medicine and internal medicine physicians to provide care in its outpatient specialty clinics. These primary care physicians work side by side with specialists who act as consultants to extend the medical center’s ability to care for underserved patients and minimize wait times for specialty care. Fifty safety net hospitals and clinics applied for the $25,000 award, and only five were selected. The LEAP Award is intended to encourage sharing and adoption of model practices. Along with Health Research for Action at UC Berkeley, Dr. Denis Mahar and colleagues are currently in the process of undertaking a more formal evaluation of the PCP/specialty model of care in order to encourage adoption within other safety net systems.

For more information about the program or about the award, contact Dr. Mahar at 415-204-5213.

The Director’s Report is published monthly. Deadline for the December edition is November 14. Publicize your upcoming events and successes by sending information to Kate Fowlie at 597 Center Avenue, Suite 255, Martinez 94553, fax 925-313-6219, or email: kfowlie@hsd.cccounty.us The Director’s Report is available online at cchealth.org and on iSITE, our intranet, at cchs.
Health Care Workers Take a Walk on the Artistic Side

Forty staff from many of our divisions shared their artistic sides at the third annual “Healthcare Workers as Creators” on September 25 at the Regional Medical Center. About 150 people attended the event, which featured musical performances, artwork and crafts by CCHS employees and included a silent art auction to benefit recent residency graduate Kinari Webb’s Health In Harmony program in Indonesia. Dr. Alan Siegel led the organizing efforts for the event, which was sponsored by ArtsChange, the nonprofit organization that grew out of the Richmond Health Center’s Quilt of Many Colors Project.

To see more photos, visit iSITE. For more information on the event, contact Dr. Alan Siegel via email: doctoralan@gmail.com

CCRMC Head Gardener Jerry Tourte (left) and Martin Garro, RN with Mental Health, rock out.

HazMat Participates in Competition

CCHS Hazardous Materials Specialists Melissa Hagen and Trisha Asuncion (pictured left to right) took second place in the annual Continuing Challenge Hazardous Categorizing (HazCat) Contest held in September in Sacramento. Melissa is a new member of the HazMat Response Team, and Trisha is just starting her training to become a member of the Response Team.

Environmental Health’s Emergency Plan Earns National Praise

Our Environmental Health (EH) Division’s emergency response planning has received national attention. Supervising Environmental Health Specialist Diana Kato and Senior Environmental Health Specialist Michele DiMaggio were invited to speak about EH’s Emergency Response Plan earlier in the year at the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) Environmental Health Training in Emergency Response course. Our EH Division is one of only a few environmental health agencies statewide to have completed the required plan, which EH finalized in February and was based on our plan first created shortly after the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake. Diana and Senior Environmental Health Specialist Rebecca Ng developed the plan, and also co-authored California’s highly regarded Disaster Field Manual for Environmental Health Specialists.

For a copy of the EH Emergency Response Plan, contact Michele DiMaggio at dmaggio@bsd.cccounty.us or call 925-692-2534.

Thirty Years of Service

Two longtime CCHS employees, CCRMC Charge Nurse Michelle Shanks and Public Health Nurse Program Manager Deborah Card, were honored for 30 years of outstanding service at two recent Board of Supervisors meetings. Michelle has worked on every unit and every shift at CCRMC and managed our Emergency Department nursing staff for eight years. Most recently, she has taken over the hospital nursing recruitment office. Deborah has served as advocate for Contra Costa Residents, particularly seniors, and served 13 years as director of the county’s Home Health Agency. One of the original participants in our Reducing Health Disparities efforts, she is a mentor to our African American Health Conductors. Videos of board meetings are available on the county website (www.co.contra-costa.ca.us).