Optimism and Dark Clouds

Last year I wrote my January message about the “Good News — and Bad.” The good news was that it appeared health reform might happen at the state level. I was optimistic that the Governor and Legislature might agree on a plan. It seemed too good to be true — and it was.

The state had just announced it was projecting a $14 billion state budget deficit for that upcoming year. We knew that meant we’d be facing reductions and streamlining, which thankfully turned out to have less of an impact in Health Services than in some past years. The deficit killed any hope of the state taking on health care reform.

Optimism about Washington

As I write this message, President-elect Barack Obama has just appointed former Senator Tom Daschle as Secretary of Health and Human Services and also as the lead on health care reform. At the same time, Obama announced his full intention to pursue health reform as a major initiative, despite — or maybe because of — the economy and other problems facing his new administration.

Besides the commitment to be sure every American has access to health care, Obama obviously recognizes that health reform will have a significant role in helping to address the economic problems. There is talk of making part of the economic stimulus funding for health system infrastructure, including construction, information technology systems and new jobs.

Exciting discussions

At recent meetings I attended of the California Association of Public Hospitals and Health Systems (CAPH) and NAPH, their national organization, efforts were underway to develop a proposal for the new administration that emphasizes the importance of public hospital systems such as ours as the platform for a transition to a new health care financing system. As a member of the NAPH health reform subcommittee and of the Executive Committee of CAPH, I am playing an active role in these exciting discussions.

We are working to frame the conversation about health reform to look beyond just health coverage to a recognition that the product of reform ought to be the improved health of the population. At a recent meeting of the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) — which has been emphasizing quality and safety initiatives in health systems — there is now a broader recognition that producing a healthier population also means working outside the walls of our hospitals and primary care settings.

We are a model

We anticipate that initial proposals to cover more people will include expansions of existing government-based programs, such as the State Children’s Health Insurance Program, Medicaid and potentially even Medicare. We are in a position to provide those expanded services given our experience with Medi-Cal and Healthy Families. Our system — an integrated system that includes CCRMC and our Health Centers, Alcohol and Other Drugs, Public Health, Mental Health and the Health Plan — is in a position to lead and be a model in the future. In the last year, I’ve seen even more collaboration among our divisions, something I’ll be talking about in the coming months.

There is increasing recognition that the
Director’s Message Continued...

exorbitant dollars spent on health care in the United States do not produce the health outcomes that we see in other industrialized countries. This is related in part to a financing system that emphasizes fee-for-service medicine and in part to a more costly specialist-driven system. At the IHI meeting, I heard a report indicating that areas in the United States with higher concentrations of specialists produce not only higher costs, but equivalent or worse outcomes than those areas that rely more on a primary care based system like ours. I’m excited that we can be a model with our system, where our family practitioners work in expanded areas, supplemented with appropriate use of specialists. We recently received a $25,000 award from the California Healthcare Foundation recognizing this model.

Ironic Twists

All that having been said, I should be dancing in my office and inviting you to join me in celebrating what looks like a rosy future for us. But then I look north to Sacramento and what I see is dark clouds. That $14 billion deficit I described last January that was addressed by painful cuts didn’t go away. A parade of experts in the last few weeks have warned of an impending $41 billion deficit over the next 18 months. They’ve predicted the state will run out of cash by late February or early March and will have no borrowing options. The Legislative Analyst, an independent advisor, says the annual shortfalls will continue through 2014. Each day seems to bring more bad news. Experts agreed that the Legislature and the Governor had to act immediately. Perhaps by the time this newsletter is published, some action may have been taken. Whatever is done will be only one of a number of steps that will have to happen to right the fiscal situation at the state level. And there is virtually no way that the solution to the State problem won’t involve significant budget cuts at the county level. The State budget crisis is bound to have an impact on health services — with or without any federal action.

Tighten your belts

So while I have never seen a time when things looked more promising for national health care reform and universal health coverage, I also cannot remember a time when dire state budget situations went on for so long and held so little promise for positive outcomes. In the coming months, I will keep you posted on what I see in store. The County Administrator has already begun asking agencies to tighten our belts. Food and water at county events have been eliminated and I’m sure there will be additional directives, such as reducing travel expenditures.

Sincerely,

William B. Walker, MD

Fabulous ’40s Theme for Annual Hospital/Health Centers Fundraiser

This year’s fundraiser for our Regional Medical Center and Health Centers will be a fabulous ’40s gala complete with live big band music and classic cars April 18 at the Historic Ford Craneway in Richmond. Hosted by the Contra Costa Regional Health Foundation, the fifth annual event, “Jazz at the Craneway,” includes dinner, dancing, and silent and live auctions. Contra Costa Regional Health Foundation is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to raise community awareness and funds for CCRMC and the Health Centers.

For tickets and more information, contact Lynda Gayden, Executive Director, Contra Costa Regional Health Foundation, at lgayden@bsd.eccounty.us or 925-957-5424.
CCHS Conducts Drive-through Flu Clinic, Emergency Drill in Richmond

Our Public Health Division’s first ever drive-through flu vaccination clinic at the Hilltop Mall in Richmond on December 6 was an overwhelming success. In all, 1,129 people received a free flu shot or nasal-spray vaccine at the event, which also served as a health emergency exercise. Emergency Services Manager Kim Cox said the exercise was designed to test our capability to dispense a large amount of medication during a health emergency. The drill also served as practice for how we would use the Strategic National Stockpile, the supply of emergency medicine distributed by the federal government. The event was the result of a partnership between CCHS, the Hilltop Mall, JC Penney, the City of Richmond, the Richmond Police Department and the Contra Costa County Sheriff’s Office of Emergency Services. Flu vaccines are still available at Public Health Immunization Clinics through spring.

For more photos from the drive-through clinic, visit iSITE. For more information, contact Kim Cox, Emergency Services Manager, at kcox@hsd.cccounty.us or 925-313-6648.

New Head of Information Systems Hired

Our Information Systems has a new Chief Information Officer. David Runt starts January 4 and will be responsible for the oversight and management of our information technology (IT) infrastructure and applications, long range IT planning and operational IT governance. David brings more than 27 years of leadership experience in health care information technology at renowned health care systems throughout the nation. He previously worked at Sun Health and Hospital Corporation of America, the nation’s largest health care services provider.

New Chief Operations Officer for Hospital and Health Centers

In an effort to provide more innovative health care, our Hospital and Health Centers Division has created a Chief Operations Officer (COO) position. Anna Roth has worked for CCRMC/HC for 15 years and began work as COO in December. She will be responsible for coordinating operations at CCRMC/HC facilities. Anna brings national and international health care experience in innovation and quality initiatives. Anna has launched a blog to better communicate with staff. Read it at http://safetynethospital.blogspot.com

Thirty Years Plus of Service

The Board of Supervisors recently recognized CCHS employee Raymond Gonzalez for his 35 years of service to the county. Raymond is an eligibility worker specialist for California Children Services in our Public Health Division. Raymond also serves on the Health Services Health Disparities Committee and the Concord Multi-Agency Trauma Team.

Videos of board meetings are available on the county website, www.co.contra-costa.ca.us

The Director’s Report is published monthly. Deadline for the February edition is January 12. 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.
GOING THE EXTRA MILE FOR SERVICE EXCELLENCE

Honor Roll

Bob Antony
Communications Equipment Specialist
Department of Information Technology

For obtaining, programming and delivering 440mhz handheld radios to CCHS Health Centers and Administration, so staff could participate successfully in a disaster preparedness exercise

—Nominated by Dana Stephens

Brenda Fields, PHN
Public Health Division

For being incredibly accessible and available to help gain health access for a foster care child, by showing compassion, understanding, patience and persistence in helping this family navigate the system

—Nominated by Michelle Williams and a foster parent

Larry Carlson
Facilities Manager

Cheryl Goodwin
Medical Staff Coordinator
Contra Costa Regional Medical Center

For facilitating a Welcome Reception for new legislators and for helping to make the event a success

—Nominated by Lara DeLaney, County Administrator’s Office

Michael Gynn, MD
Cynthia Savage, MD
David Solomon, MD
Fifth Floor Nursing Staff
Pre-Op and Recovery Staff
Contra Costa Regional Medical Center

For the compassionate treatment a patient received before, during and after surgery

—Nominated by a patient

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.

Milestones
Congratulations to these employees who have given us long years of service: Edna Noguera, Donna Page, Chinyere Madawaki, Diane Shouse, Maria Bongco, Mieko Windt, David Ramirez, Stephanie Stovall, Patricia Vigil, Windy Murphy (10 years); Maria Perez-Garcia, Stephanie Smith, Jennifer Westerman, Ellen Burke, Salvador Ruiz-Mora, Kara Weinreich (15 years); Noel Rasmussen, Michael Ourique, Patrick Lewis, Kelene Steelman, Catherine Myers (20 years); Anamaree Rea (25 years); and Gloria Suyat (30 years).
For their outstanding efforts in organizing and implementing a flu clinic and mass vaccination exercise on December 6 that mobilized dozens of volunteers and served more than 1,100 West County residents

—Nominated by William Walker, MD

Eric Jonsson
Hazardous Materials Specialist II
Hazardous Materials Division

For helping to guide the 2008 Worst Case Discharge Incident Management Team Exercise

—Nominated by Mike Coyle, Chevron

Nia Saechao
Certified Nursing Assistant
Contra Costa Regional Medical Center

For going above and beyond when helping the nursing staff, for taking it upon himself to assist patients in their care and for being a tremendous asset

—Nominated by 4B Nursing Staff, Dayshift

Sylvia Taqi-Eddin
Senior Health Education Specialist
Public Health Division

For an exceptional sense of shared responsibility, filling in for a co-worker, and remaining on par to exceed contract expectations for the second consecutive year

—Nominated by Itika Greene

For putting their own workloads on hold and working together as a team to complete the new Community Provider Manual two weeks ahead of deadline

—Nominated by Patricia Tanquary
Reducing Health Disparities

The Public Health Division uses a broad spectrum of strategies and an array of services to promote and protect the health and well-being of the individual, family and community in Contra Costa County with special attention to those communities and populations most at risk for poor health outcomes and those most affected by environmental inequities. Several of Public Health's many programs are highlighted this month for their RHD efforts.

FMCH Programs Shares Life Course Perspective

Forty Health Services staff from different divisions and community partners recently heard a compelling presentation by our Family, Maternal and Child Health (FMCH) Programs Director Cheri Pies and Life Course Initiative Coordinator Padmini Parthasarathy about an ambitious 15-year effort launched in 2005. Based on the Life Course Perspective (LCP), the effort is designed to reduce disparities in birth outcomes by achieving health equity, optimizing reproductive potential, changing the health of a generation, and bringing about a shift in the planning, delivery, and evaluation of maternal, child and adolescent health (MCAH) services. The new approach suggests that beyond prenatal care, a complex interplay of biological, behavioral, psychological, and social protective and risk factors contributes to birth outcomes and health outcomes across the span of a person’s life. Cheri and Padmini explained how FMCH Programs is redesigning MCAH practices and how the LCP can be integrated into current and future CCHS activities. As part of LCP, FMCH Programs is launching Building Economic Security Today (BEST), an asset development pilot aimed at improving financial security and stability — and health outcomes — for this generation and future generations of low-income families.

To arrange a presentation about the Life Course Perspective and FMCH Programs’ Life Course Initiative, contact Padmini Parthasarathy at 925-313-6254 or pparthas@hsd.cccounty.us.
Since our Public Health Division assumed responsibility for language access issues earlier this year, particularly for the Health Care Interpreter Network (HCIN), it has made great strides to ensure that providers and staff can communicate in the many languages spoken by our patients/clients/consumers.

Under the direction of Communicable Disease Program Chief Francie Wise, Program Director Sally McFalone, Maggie Nguyen and Martin Lynch, with the assistance of IS staff and others, have been spearheading recent efforts. They have focused on assessing and updating interpretation equipment throughout Contra Costa Regional Medical Center (CCRMC), our Health Centers and beyond. Detention Health is using new equipment to serve its population and 13 new video interpretation units have recently been deployed at CCRMC with more on order for the Health Centers. The trio is also working closely with the Contra Costa Health Plan to assess its language needs. “As we’ve done training and tested equipment, staff, providers, patients and even recently the Health Plan’s Managed Care Commission have been excited to see the equipment in action,” says Sally.

As a partner in the statewide HCIN that includes hospitals and health centers, our health system can provide accurate, timely and effective communication with patients/consumers/clients, regardless of the primary language spoken. HCIN offers real-time language interpretation via video or phone that is accessed by staff during the clinic visit, hospital stay or home visit. Interpreters are shared among the members; CCHS has 14 interpreters on the system, including the Limited English Assistance Program staff. Future plans include installing more equipment, providing ongoing training, earlier recognition of the need for interpretation services at each step of the care process and providing “I speak” cards and other tools to assist patients to more effectively communicate their need for interpretation services.

Contact Sally McFalone at 925-313-6242 or smcfalon@hsd.cccounty.us for more information about language access issues.

AIDS Program staff are focusing on high-risk clients to reduce the spread of AIDS.

Working with the HIV/AIDS Consortium, Christine and her staff are implementing a five-year plan to bring more African Americans into testing and provide greater access to care. In fact, more than 80% of the people served are either African American or Latino and the program is designated by the federal government as a Minority AIDS provider.

Program Coordinator of Client Services Carmen Beyers’ team has out-of-care coordinators who search out clients who have tested positive and have a high number of broken appointments. The team develops individual treatment plans that help “positives” work with their risk. They also work internally with our Center for Health in North Richmond, our Alcohol and Other Drugs Division and others to reach clients. In West County, where a federally funded program is in place, the number of kept appointments has increased from 67% to 80% at the Richmond Health Center infectious disease clinic. Another good sign: New cases of AIDS attributed to injection drug use—which involves high number of African Americans—dropped significantly.

Since about 25% of the people with HIV don’t know they are infected, Education and Services Supervisor Carla Goad works with community partners to get out the message that testing is vital to staying healthy. “We can’t do this alone and community-based organizations reach people we can’t,” says Carla. “Knowing whether you’re HIV positive keeps open many more treatment options so early testing is vital.”
Restaurant Plan Updates Easier to Access with New Website

Our Environmental Health Division (EH) has ramped up its website to make it easier for people opening a restaurant or other food facility to check the status of their plans. These online services create a more accessible and transparent application process for members of the public. “Plan Check Status” allows an applicant to quickly and easily find out if a plan is approved, rejected or still under review, and who is reviewing their plans. CCHS is the first county health department in California to offer this service on its website. EH Director Sherman Quinlan said Plan Check Status is part of an ongoing effort to improve services for applicants. As an indication of its success, Sherman said the number of telephone calls regarding the status of plans has decreased by almost half since the launch of Plan Check Status.

For more information, contact Sherman Quinlan at 925-692-2558 or squinlan@hsd.cccounty.us. Check out the new service at cchealth.org

Annual Industrial Safety Ordinance Report Shows Major Improvements

There was not one major chemical accident or release at any of the petroleum refineries or chemical plants covered by the county’s Industrial Safety Ordinance (ISO) for the first time since the ordinance took effect in 1999. Hazardous Materials Programs Director Randy Sawyer and Accidental Release Prevention Programs Engineer Supervisor Cho Nai Cheung presented the 2008 ISO report to the Board of Supervisors on December 9. The report highlighted the efforts made by the facilities, the community, the Board of Supervisors and our HazMat staff to reduce the number of incidents that occur. The Board praised the safety improvements and commended Randy, CCHS, the participating industry members and the community for their efforts to make the ISO possible.

For more information about the Industrial Safety Ordinance, contact Randy Sawyer at rsawyer@hsd.cccounty.us or 925-646-2286. View the entire report at cchealth.org

Health Coverage Initiative Enrollment a Success

Contra Costa Health Services, along with nine other counties in California, was selected to receive federal funds to provide health coverage to low-income, uninsured residents. We were approved to receive $45 million over three years beginning in September 2007. In year one of Contra Costa’s Health Coverage Initiative (HCI), more than 8,500 Contra Costa residents were enrolled in the program. Our Financial Counselors determine eligibility for HCI, and CCHP administers the benefits. Although most HCI enrollees receive their health care with CCHS, some enrollees receive their primary care with La Clinica de la Raza or Brookside Community Health Center. CCHP’s managed care model of health care helps HCI enrollees connect with a primary care provider immediately upon enrollment, gives them access to preventative health care services, and links them to specialty and ancillary services. Program Manager Wanda Session said one of the goals of the program is to reduce inappropriate visits to the Emergency Department and help those with chronic health conditions to manage their disease through case management.

An informational brochure is available on our website at www.cchealth.org/insurance/ or contact Wanda Session at wsession@hsd.cccounty.us