No Crystal Ball Needed for Future

By the time you read this message, the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives may have reached a compromise on a health care reform bill and we may have a new law that will expand coverage to many people who are currently uninsured.

Of course the devil is in the details so until we’ve had a chance to fully absorb whatever finally is enacted, we won’t know how many important provisions remained in the bill and how many were compromised away.

A gap until implementation

There are certainly some things we know now that are problematic. First, the new law wouldn’t take effect until 2013–14, leaving many millions of people without coverage. Those newly uninsured people will continue to strain safety net systems like ours as the economy recovers slowly, if at all, and those who are unemployed will lose their insurance and maybe even their COBRA eligibility.

I was in Washington, D.C., with a delegation from the California Association of Public Hospitals and Health Systems (CAPH) recently to talk about the renewal of the Medi-Cal waiver that governs how federal and state funds flow to our safety net systems. We made several suggestions about how this process could also address support for the safety net providers during the gap. We have been encouraging the Obama administration to consider creating pilot projects that would begin to test some of the strategies that will be implemented when health reform is finally rolled out. For California, we are urging that the Healthcare Coverage Initiative we participate in as a pilot be expanded so more people can be covered sooner. That will prepare us for health reform when providers like us will be asked to expand services for those not now insured.

Rebuilding the Richmond Health Center

Despite the unknowns, these developments are exciting and hold a good deal of promise, along with another event that occurred while I was in Washington. Supervisor Gioia and I were invited to attend a White House announcement related to community health centers. At the event, President Obama (yes, I was in the same room with him but did not get the opportunity to shake his hand or talk to him) announced that we are be-
ing awarded $12 million to rebuild the Richmond Health Center. (You can see the announcement at the White House on our Facebook page).

The Richmond Health Center is the only one of our eight Health Centers that has not been rebuilt. It is more than 30 years old and dysfunctional, with much unusable space. There are many details yet to be resolved but it was a wonderful morale boost to be there for the announcement and to know we can begin to move ahead with this long overdue project.

And now for the bad news
I wish I could end this beginning-of-the-year message on those high notes, but unfortunately, I have to share some much more somber thoughts with you. It doesn’t take a crystal ball to know we have some very rough waters ahead of us. County Administrator David Twa has already spoken publically about what to expect, most recently in an interview in the Contra Costa Times: “What I’ve said to anybody who will listen is next year will be bad and the following year will be worse,” he said, explaining that the county is already looking at a shortfall for the upcoming 2010–11 fiscal year of between $25 million and $37 million on a county budget that’s currently $1.2 billion. That’s before almost-certain additional cutbacks from the state hit local governments, which will only make matters worse. “We’ve squeezed out just about everything we can in terms of making cuts, laying people off, using reserves,” Twa said. “Now you have to look at what programs are you willing to eliminate or simply cannibalize.” Although the CAO didn’t say where those cuts would be made, he was quoted as saying that the big “cost drivers” are health care, human services and public safety, collectively making up about 80% of the county budget.

Drawing the line
We’ll be making our position clear. Health reform may be coming and may provide relief, but the next few years are critical. If we don’t protect the core of our system, there will be no rebuilding in time for us to participate in the reforms. Dismantling our model safety net program will deprive thousands of Contra Costa residents of services they need every day to literally save their lives. The Hippocratic Oath I took as a physician more than four decades ago requires that first, I “do no harm.” Beyond that, it is my moral obligation as the Health Services Director and Health Officer of a county that serves more than 1 million people to protect the health of our communities and I will do that to the best of my ability. It will be up to us who are shepherds of our safety net to ensure that the net remains in place for the most vulnerable members of our community after the smoke clears.

The budget dance begins
We won’t have long to wait for the next chapter. I will shortly be given budget targets for reductions, with our proposed cuts due to the CAO in February, hearings scheduled for April 20 and a budget adoption date of May 11. I’ll be sharing more with you as we begin to make hard decisions about what to eliminate.

At the final 2009 meeting of my Senior Staff, I asked each of them to share a highlight from the past year and provide a heads up for a critical issue facing their Divisions in 2010. As they gave their reports, I realized once again what an amazing organization this is. We have an extraordinary array of services and programs under one administrative roof and increasingly more collaboration among our Divisions. In the months ahead, I know our track record of success, the outstanding work each of you do and the importance of our mission will help us through the hard times.

Sincerely,

William B. Walker, MD.
Stimulus Dollars to Help Build New West County Health Center
In two years, a state-of-the-art Health Center will replace the aging Richmond Health Center that has served West County for more than four decades. Last month, Health Services Director Dr. William Walker and County Supervisor John Gioia traveled to the nation’s Capitol to hear President Barack Obama announce a $12 million grant award in federal stimulus funds to relocate and rebuild the aging facility. The intent is to build the new Health Center on the Doctors Medical Center campus in San Pablo. The new Health Center will benefit the entire community. It will be close to public transit, have a higher patient capacity and it will be able to share resources with Doctors Medical Center. The Richmond Health Center is the last of our eight Health Centers to be replaced. The grant process was highly competitive and was nationwide in scope. The Department was awarded the only grant of this size in California, and one of only six of this size in the nation. The grant application was successful because of the dedication, professionalism and leadership of Andrea Dubrow and Sue Crosby and for the expertise and project management skills of Steve Harris. The Department owes all three individuals a round of applause for a job well done.

See a television news story on this award: visit our Facebook page.

Public Health Makes H1N1 Flu Vaccine Available to Everyone
Our Public Health Division was able to make H1N1 flu vaccines available for everyone last month at the Public Health flu vaccination clinics after vaccine supplies improved. In December, Public Health held its final mass-vaccination clinic, as well as 44 smaller clinics located throughout the county. Immunization Coordinator Erika Jenssen said the clinics protected thousands of additional residents from H1N1 flu. She said vaccine is more readily available and people have more options on where to get vaccinated. People who still haven’t received the vaccine should check with their health care provider or visit our website for more information. Normal flu seasons can extend into April and it’s unknown what flu activity will be like in the coming months so it’s important for everyone to get vaccinated.

To find out more about flu vaccination efforts, visit www.cchealth.org or call 1-888-959-9911. See iSITE for additional photos.

Ernesto Jacobo with Environmental Health served as foot traffic supervisor at the H1N1 vaccination clinic December 6 in Pittsburg.

Director’s Report
January 2010
The director’s report showcases 2010–11 Division strategies and activities to address four CCHS Reducing Health Disparities goals. The goals are: Improving consumer/client/patient/customer experience; Engaging and Partnering with community and public entities; Improving staff respect, responsiveness and cultural sensitivity; and Creating systems that support and promote access and respectful delivery of services. The complete CCHS RHD plan is available at http://www.cchealth.org

Since 2003, when the Reducing Health Disparities Initiative was born, each Division has worked to reduce health disparities by addressing issues of diversity and linguistic and cultural competence. This month, the RHD page looks to the future and shares some of Health Services’ many resolutions for the New Year.

- Data Collection Task Force: Begin department wide effort to develop consistent collection of REAL (Race, Ethnicity, And Language preference) data.
- East County African American Collaborative: Plan first Contra Costa African American Health Summit.
- Personnel: Complete training all managers on Service Excellence.
- Mental Health: Implement trainings that improve cultural competency of providers to work with LG-BTQQI individuals and their families as well as circulate educational materials that are welcoming.
- Linguistic Access Unit: Increase availability of the Health Care Interpreter Network to all divisions of Health Services and support an increased number of network partners throughout California and the United States.
- Community Health Assessment, Planning & Evaluation: Complete draft of cultural competency assessment tool for Medical Residents based on patient focus group input.
- Reducing Health Disparities Unit: Collaborate with Division staff to develop methods to integrate and institutionalize RHD efforts.
- Pittsburg Diabetes Team: Work with La Superior Mexican Market to develop a healthy foods section for diabetics.
- Health Care for the Homeless: Partner with San Quentin and the Health Services Cross Divisional Violence Team to implement a health care transition program for newly released convicts.
- CCHP: Redesign new employee orientation process and materials to include the best of RHD, LG-BTQQI and Linguistic Access training.
Family, Maternal & Child Health: Implement Building Economic Security Today policies and practices with home visiting and WIC clients.

Health Services: Work with John Muir Health, City of Richmond, California Children’s Services and Community Organizations in Antioch to launch East and West County victims of gun violence intervention project.


Promotoras: Join Richmond Health Center teams with pedi-obesity and diabetes patient group visits.

Reducing Health Disparities and Community Education & Information units: Continue to showcase and promote efforts through Director’s Report and website.

Community Health Assessment, Planning and Evaluation Unit: Include section on health inequities in the 2010 Community Health Indicator Report.

LGBTQQI team: Launch pride stories on RHD page on isite.

Honor Roll
GOING THE EXTRA MILE FOR SERVICE EXCELLENCE

Cyndy Abram
Health Care Risk Manager
Contra Costa Regional Medical Center

For providing timely and creative screensavers for the CME program, Noon Conference, H1N1 and other topics that help doctors and will assist in reaccreditation at CCRM C.

♦ Nominated by David Pepper, Alan Siegel, Linda Thomas and Catherine Zonfrello

Trisha Asuncion
Hazardous Materials Specialist I
Todd Hickman
Hazardous Materials Specialist II
Hazardous Materials Program

Gail Doyle
Health Education Specialist
Ana Villalobos
Community Health Worker
Lead Poisoning Prevention Project

Grace Hagopian, PHN
Public Health Clinic Services
Cheri Webster
Clerk—Experienced Level
Community Wellness & Prevention Program

For their persistent work to identify hazardous levels of lead in bean pots sold at FoodMaxx stores as “lead-free” and the resulting removal of the pots from store shelves.

♦ Nominated by Joanne Genet

Access Fulfillment Specialists
(please see tsite for list of names)
Information Systems

For responding to system access requests in a very timely fashion, typically within one business day, in spite of hundreds of requests each month.

♦ Nominated by Mike Shubat

Albert Borden
Programmer/Analyst
Information Systems

For being a consummate professional with a real zeal for mining data and information systems to provide decision support to CCRM C/Health Centers and for being responsive, thorough, extremely detail-oriented, willing to please and for applying his skills to the achievement of our goals.

♦ Nominated by Dianne Dunn-Bowie

Jean Broadnax
Rose Tripp
Linda Wise
Medical Social Workers II
Medical Social Services

For providing respectful, high quality assessments and care for pregnant women and families and for being proactive, creative and timely in linking children to limited resources.

♦ Nominated by Krista Peterson

Debbie Card
Public Health Nurse Program Manager
Public Health

For diligence in following up with an oxygen-dependent patient recently released from prison and suffering from a variety of chronic illnesses. She went the extra mile to make sure this patient had a warm hand off into CCHS.

♦ Nominated by Tiombe Mashama

Milestones Congratulations to these employees who have given us long years of service: Basilisa Reyes, Anquanetia Reed, Jacqueline Lewis, Ofelia Ontiveros, Veronica Santolaya, Andrea Dubrow, Mary Mills, Linda Wohler, Candace Jacobus, Cheri Webster, Leatasha Austin, Gurdeet Bhandal, Lela Jones (10 years); Jennifer Huynh, Luisa Petite, Diane Russo, Susan Luck, Anita De Vera, Elizabeth Garcia, Denise Peschel (15 years); Consuelo Yu, Brenda Hardeman, Jo-Anne Linares, William Swenson, Phillip Clarke, Rebecca Viceral, Tonya Brown, Martha Delgado, Margaret Robbins (20 years); Susan Farley, Timothy Tam, Benet Moody, Barbara Center, Roberta Bowers (25 years); Beverly Cox and Luwanda Hill (30 years).
Honor Roll
GOING THE EXTRA MILE FOR SERVICE EXCELLENCE

Sheila Hunter
Network Administrator II
Information Systems

For responding quickly and professionally to urgent requests for member and provider call center message changes and for making sure there were no glitches on the first County furlough day.

♦️ Nominated by Judi Louro

Sheba Gorospe
Clerk—Senior Level
Juleine Latteri
Administrative Services Assistant III
Emergency Medical Services

For their extraordinary participation in the development and maintenance of the Contra Costa County Medical Reserve Corps, their warm greetings and assistance to volunteers in registration, the swearing in and ID badge processes as well as eye-catching newsletters and marketing material.

♦️ Nominated by Barbara Center

Carol Pedersen
Senior Public Health Nutrition
WIC Program

For clever planning of team building programs for the WIC Program office staff in December.

♦️ Nominated by Jeanne Conboy

Daniela Jaramillo Montecinos
Josefina Lanzas
Teresita Medina
Comfort Nwamuo
Home Economists
WIC Program

For providing nutrition education to a record number of clients for the WIC Program in October in Contra Costa County.

♦️ Nominated by Jeanne Conboy

Patti Creel
Community Health Worker Specialist
Family, Maternal & Child Health Programs

For her willingness to graciously go beyond program expectations to provide supportive services to a bereaved family during an extremely difficult time in their lives and for the thorough follow-up and compassionate care.

♦️ Nominated by Dawn Dailey

Rhonda Allen
Network Analyst II
Hao Luu
IS Technician I
Information Systems
Rebecca Render, MD
Contra Costa Regional Medical Center

For granting a CCRM patient’s last wish to connect with family in another country via a web connection.

♦️ Nominated by Sally McFalone

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 commendation form by email to ServicEX@hsd.cccounty.us or fax to 925-957-5401. Forms are on our website (www.cchealth.org on About Us page) or iSITE, our intranet, at http://cchs. Nominations are subject to approval by Division Directors.

Want to keep up with the latest Health Services news?
Follow us on Facebook (Contra Costa Health Services) and Twitter (www.twitter.com/CoCoHealth) for news and health alerts!
Lead Discovered in Ceramic Bean Pots
Lead Poisoning Prevention Specialist Ana Villalobos was recently invited to discuss the hazards of lead in ceramic bean pots on Univision’s Encuentro en la Bahía television show. Ana, along with other Lead Poisoning Prevention Project and Hazardous Materials staff, discovered that certain ceramic bean pots contained lead during a home visit. The pots were being sold at FoodMaxx stores and were stamped lead-free. The discovery of lead in the pots prompted the chain to stop selling the pots and offer refunds for previously sold pots. Ana said the lead from the pots could not be removed and that using the pots for cooking could cause lead to concentrate in the food. On the show, Ana also discussed the dangers of lead in toys and other household products.

To find out more about the Lead Poisoning Prevention Project, visit www.cchealth.org/groups/lead_prevention/ or call 925-313-6549.

Column Offers Tips for Lead-Safe Gifts
A recent Healthy Outlook column was published just in time to offer lead-safe tips for the holiday gift-giving season. Lead Poisoning Prevention Project Health Educator Gail Doyle wrote that children poisoned by lead usually don’t look sick or act different. By itself, a toy might not pose a serious threat, but lead from multiple sources could build up over time in the body. Gail said a child’s body is small so it only takes a little bit of lead to do a lot of harm. The only way to determine if a child has been exposed to an unsafe amount of lead is a blood test. There are home kits to test if lead is present on the surface of toys. For more information about lead and toys, visit our website.

To read more of this or other Healthy Outlook columns by CCHS staff, visit www.cchealth.org and click on the Healthy Outlook link in Items of Interest or on the Publications page.
CCHS Staff Help ICU Patient Say Goodbye to Family

A terminally ill patient in our Regional Medical Center's Intensive Care Unit was able to say goodbye to overseas relatives thanks to special efforts by staff. Dr. Rebecca Render, Information Services Network Analyst Rhonda Allen, IT Technician Hao Luu and Linguistic Services Director Sally McFalone pooled resources to set up an in-room webcam so the patient could see relatives who couldn’t be there. Rhonda said she was moved when the patient, no longer able to talk, gently waved to the family members on the other side of the screen. Though Rhonda and Sally said they are unable to repeat the service at this time, they hope it will become more widely available in the future.

To find out about the possible implementation of this technology, contact Sally McFalone at smcfalone@hsd.cccounty.us or 925-313-6242.

You Are a Disaster Service Worker

Did you know that California law states all county employees—from every department—could be required to serve as Disaster Service Workers in an emergency? Depending on the type of disaster, there will be people who may need food, shelter, medical services or general information. Even if you do not work directly in any of these fields, you could be enlisted to help provide any of these services to residents, but you will only be assigned duties you are able to perform. Contra Costa Health Services has systems that can alert some employees about emergencies and also an Employee Emergency Hotline that all employees can call for instructions (1-866-946-9911). For information, visit www.cchealth.org/topics/emergencies/ or talk with your supervisor.

Take the iSITE Survey

Do you like iSITE, our Intranet? Do you hate it? Visit isite (http://cchs/) between Jan. 6 and Jan. 20 to provide your feedback and help is design a new and improved intranet for cchs.

Hazardous Materials Division Gets New Offices

After roughly 20 years at its old location, our Hazardous Materials Division has a new home. The new offices are located at 4585 Pacheco Boulevard, Suite 100, in Martinez. HazMat also has a new phone number: 925-335-3200.
Federal Funding Sought to Prevent Obesity

Health Services has applied for a $12 million obesity prevention grant from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This monumental effort was undertaken by Community Wellness & Prevention Program Director Tracey Rattray and her staff including Nancy Baer, Andrea Menefee, Denise Milosevich and Shannon Ladner-Beasley, along with Clinic Services’ Andrea DuBrow and Sue Crosby, TeenAge Program’s Jeff Gould, and Public Health’s Bill Sorrell. They all played major roles in engaging community partners to develop a plan that would reduce obesity by using strategies involving the media, accessibility, price, point of purchase and social support. The plan would promote good nutrition and physical activity by reducing consumption of sugary drinks, expanding distribution of locally grown produce, increasing the stock of healthy foods at local stores, improving streets for pedestrians and bicyclists, increasing access to regional parks, working with county and city redevelopment departments to improve neighborhood parks, and other strategies. Tracey said there are many parts of the plan that can be put into practice even if Contra Costa does not receive the funding. Awards will be announced next month.

To find out more about the grant application, visit www.cchealth.org/cppw/

Employees Pull Through for Charities

Despite tough economic times, Health Services staff again have opened their hearts and pocketbooks in times of need. cchs employees donated or pledged $54,482 to the county’s 2009 Combined Charities Campaign. Results from the countywide effort were presented to the Board of Supervisors last month. The drive benefits the Bay Area Black United Fund, Earth Share of California, Local Independent Charities, United Way and many other worthy causes. In all, the generosity of county employees raised more than $250,000. cchs finished as the second most giving department.

AODS Prenatal Support Program Promotes Healthy Pregnancies

A prenatal support program launched last spring is showing early signs of success. Our Alcohol and Other Drug Services Division began the Prenatal Support Counseling Program at Healthy Start Clinics in our Martinez, Pittsburg and Richmond Health Centers. The aim is to help women cut back or eliminate the use of alcohol and other drugs during pregnancy. AODS Perinatal Substance Abuse Consultant Dorie Klein helped get the effort rolling after the Born Free program was phased out last year. Women are screened for their issues, and then receive counseling and follow-up. Referrals can be made from ob-gyn doctors in our system. First Five Consultant Elaine Zahnd, AODS Program Manager Fatima Matal Sol and the staffs at Healthy Start and Family, Maternal and Child Health have all worked on the program’s rollout.