Five Minutes vs. Five Days

If current research is to be believed, almost half of you probably wouldn’t want to be a guest at my house this Thanksgiving because I require every member of my family who shows up for turkey to have gotten a flu vaccine (they are all members of the Contra Costa Health Plan). And I’ve been doing it for years.

Before you skip the rest of this message—because you either think I’m overzealous or the topic doesn’t interest you because you don’t ever get the flu, you think the vaccine is unsafe or that it will make you sick or you aren’t sure which information you hear is correct—I’d like to ask you to read all the way through this message and then decide. Who is the “you” I’m talking to?

First and foremost, it’s anyone who has contact with our patients, the community, newborns, small children, older people, pregnant women, people with compromised immune systems—I could go on. Get the point?

What the experts say

Let me try a few facts first. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) report that approximately 5% to 20% of U.S. residents get the flu, and more than 200,000 people are hospitalized for flu-related complications each year. Over a period of 30 years, between 1976 and 2006, estimates of flu-associated deaths range from a low of about 3,000 to a high of about 49,000 people annually.

The American Academy of Pediatrics last month issued a policy statement emphasizing the need for hospitals to create and enforce mandatory flu vaccination programs for all health workers—except those exempt for medical or religious reasons—to prevent the spread of the virus to patients. They said that even hospital cafeteria and laundry workers should be vaccinated because they could indirectly pass the virus on to patients.

A similar policy statement was recently released by the Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America, indicating that flu vaccination should be a condition of employment, except for those with medical exemptions. Just 40% of American health workers receive a yearly flu shot, even though an 80% rate would offer the best protection in health facilities.

Although so far, we’ve just restricted our approach to imploring everyone to get vaccine, mandating this kind of protection seems no different to me than requiring TB tests and pre-employment physicals.
Are we there yet?

Although the CDC doesn’t mandate flu vaccinations, they do recommend that all health care workers get vaccinated. And the 2010 goal of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is to hit at least 60%. This seems like a pretty measly number if you think about the fact that health workers have a mission to care for and protect the well being of residents—to say nothing of their families, friends and neighbors. In fact, a new report from Consumers Union says that only 52.4% of health care workers in California hospitals received a vaccine last year. California does require hospitals to offer free flu vaccines to their workers and to report their vaccination rates and flu shot refusal rates.

Our own numbers are consistent with the state rate, which puzzles me. Doesn’t it seem at the least odd and at the most unprofessional that when we know we could stop the spread of disease by getting vaccinated, we don’t? Especially when we know you can’t get the flu from the vaccine and the vaccine is safe?

Why do it?

As a physician and the Health Officer for a county of more than 1 million people, I can think of some compelling reasons why we should all get vaccinated. First, my patients ask me every year if I’d had my flu shot. What kind of a hypocrite would I be to prescribe something for them that I wasn’t willing to do myself? The fact that getting vaccinated is the most efficient way to keep the general population from getting sick and is a way to protect the most vulnerable are also good reasons—at least I think so.

Our unique approach

Several months ago, led by our Public Health Division and Health Emergency Manager Kim Cox, we launched an effort in partnership with community organizations to raise community awareness about the need to get immunized against the flu (see story on Page 3). You’ll soon be seeing and hearing the messages that were developed, with funding from the CDC. “Five Minutes vs. Five Days,” makes the point that it’s a lot easier to take a short break to get a flu shot—or nasal spray—than to be sick for five days. Our Community Education and Information Unit and community partners have created public services announcements, videos targeting specific populations posted on YouTube, written material, a podcast by me online and my special favorite: a song by our Dr. Alan Siegal and his band (which is available on our website). The bottom line of all this is to get almost everyone (except children under 6 months old) to be vaccinated. And by the way, this year’s vaccine addresses three flu strains, including H1N1.

The moral high ground

If none of this has compelled you to get your flu vaccine, I’d like to appeal to the commitment demonstrated by all of you who choose to work in public health systems. Maybe you don’t think you’ll get sick—and don’t remember that you can transmit influenza even if you actually have no symptoms. Maybe you don’t like shots (get the nasal spray) and don’t want to be inconvenienced by going to a site that offers the vaccine (check isite, our website or, if you work at ccrmc or a Health Center, vaccine will be offered at your site). Maybe you have enough sick leave so you’d welcome a stretch in bed.

Instead, consider the patients you breathe near, the folks who ride BART with you, stand in the supermarket line, sit across from you at a meeting, attend classes you teach, appear at the front desk of your office. They might not be as lucky or as healthy or as well off financially as you are. Is it really fair to them? Why not do it if you can help prevent the spread of a disease that is unpredictable and could be severe?

I welcome comments on this and all my monthly messages, email me at william.walker@hsd.cccounty.us

Sincerely,

William B. Walker, MD
Grants Fund Flu Immunization Outreach to Vulnerable Groups

As part of efforts to encourage flu vaccinations, our Public Health Division awarded 32 grants totaling more than $750,000 in Centers for Communicable Disease and Prevention funds several months ago to community groups to promote and administer H1N1 vaccine among hard-to-reach, under-vaccinated, and medically fragile people in Contra Costa. We partnered with the Community Clinic Consortium, the Contra Costa Childcare Council and Brown Miller Communications to produce print materials to encourage health care workers and child care providers to get vaccinated. These materials will soon be available in health care settings and on our website. Other partners included ARC and RYSE, the West County youth center, which produced videos about the flu featuring their respective populations. Emergency Services Manager Kim Cox said the grant effort was highly successful in building community partnerships for health emergency preparedness. Kim said it is important for all Health Services staff to get vaccinated against the flu, to protect ourselves and the vulnerable communities we serve.

To view materials produced by this campaign, visit www.cchealth.org/topics/flu/

Protect Yourself from Influenza

It's time to get vaccinated against the flu. Everyone 6 months and older should get vaccinated. There's only one vaccine this year and it will protect you from H1N1 and two other flu viruses. Vaccine is available for employees at Vista Oaks Occupational Health (10 Douglas Drive, Martinez) at no cost to CCHP members and $25 for everyone else. Kaiser members should call 1-800-573-5811. Our Health Centers will begin flu clinics in mid-October. On November 10, our Public Health Division will cease normal operations for one day to host mass flu vaccination clinics at nine locations throughout the county. Check www.cchealth.org for details.

Congressmen Use Regional Medical Center to Announce New Consumer Protections

Congressmen George Miller and John Garamendi recently held a press conference at our Contra Costa Regional Medical Center to announce major health reform changes that began taking effect last month. The changes—dubbed the Patient's Bill of Rights—are a part of the Affordable Health Care Act and improve access to health insurance. Health Services Director Dr. William Walker, who opened the press conference, said our Medical Center and Health Centers are Ground Zero for the health insurance crisis in our county. He said the Affordable Health Care Act would make it easier for Americans to get and keep health insurance.

To view materials produced by this campaign, visit www.cchealth.org/topics/flu/
Kim Cox  
Emergency Services Manager  
Public Health  

For developing an innovative process to promote community involvement in CCHS emergency planning resulting in grants to 32 community organizations and partnerships with the communities we serve.

♦ Nominated by Francie Wise

H1N1 Community Partners  
(please see isite for a list of names)  

For great work in helping Contra Costa become better prepared to respond to emergencies and for your fabulous H1N1 presentations at the Emergency Preparedness Symposium in Sacramento.

♦ Nominated by Kim Cox

Luwanda Hill  
Registration Supervisor  
Richmond Health Center  

For lending her supervisory skills and experience to lead an improvement effort, for accomplishing new processes implementation and successful selection of personnel and for demonstrating what service excellence in action has to look like.

♦ Nominated by Arturo Hernandez & Linda Jursa

Michael Kent  
Hazardous Materials Ombudsman  
Public Health  

For appearing in a television interview on extremely short notice, for his knowledge and experience that lent credibility to the story and for being a public servant who is highly capable and deeply cares about the communities he serves and protects.

♦ Nominated by Sharon Lin, P.E., Remedial Project Manager, EPA Region 9 Superfund Division

Tatiana Marek*  
Clerk – Senior Level  
Pittsburg Health Center  

For being a valuable employee — dependable, reliable and knowledgeable in all aspects of registration. She is definitely an asset.

♦ Nominated by Lorena Garcia & Linda Moorhead

Rosemarie Sandoval  
Clerical Supervisor  
Brentwood Health Center  

For guiding me through the hiring process, for her useful advice, patience and understanding, for always being there to help staff, for her professionalism, kindness and endless support.

♦ Nominated by Inas Moussa

*Also nominated last month for Going the Extra Mile
October Milestones

Congratulations to these employees who have given us long years of service: May M. Word, Kuljit K. Bhandal, Monica L. Harrich, Amelita T. Toleyos, Janis Gragg, Brett F. Beaver, Sonia Garcia, Rita M. Lopez, Micheal L. Garner, Mercedita S. Salazar, Sharon L. Eriksen, Senetta R. Robertson, Stephen D. Lamar (10 years); Margery K. Kushner, Catherine Zonfrello, Maxine L. Larry, Blanca Lopez, Victoria L. Brown, Julie Freestone, Victor Klatt (15 years); Galina Genina, Niloufar Shafigh, Sonya R. Jacoby, Rosemarie Aguinaga-Tripp, Deborah Mijares, Mabel Negron, Cyril K. Hinds, Suzanne K. Crowe (20 years); Jody E. Adelberg, Marsha A. Flakoll (25 years); and Martha De La Torre (40 years).

Ericka Sexton
Odessa Staton
Clerk – Specialist Level
CCRM Medical Records

For their consistent and professional effort in ensuring accuracy, researching, identifying and addressing disparities on Medical Record Number requests and quickly delivering existing or new numbers.

♦ Nominated by Gary Smith

Staff
Contra Costa Regional Medical Center

For the kindness and help given to my son. Your hospital is the best!

♦ Nominated by a patient’s mother

Julie Vasquez
Community Health Worker II
Public Health Clinic Services

For helping an uninsured patient contact the Financial Counselor and obtain a physical quickly.

♦ Nominated by a patient

Gwenndolyn White
Health Education Specialist
Community Wellness & Prevention Program

For her hard work in developing a nutrition curriculum for teacher training in West Contra Costa County elementary schools and for her all around positive and helpful demeanor.

♦ Nominated by Andrea Menefee

Do you know someone who’s going the extra mile?


Jeanine Vasquez
Community Health Worker II
Public Health Clinic Services

For helping an uninsured patient contact the Financial Counselor and obtain a physical quickly.

♦ Nominated by a patient

Gwenndolyn White
Health Education Specialist
Community Wellness & Prevention Program

For her hard work in developing a nutrition curriculum for teacher training in West Contra Costa County elementary schools and for her all around positive and helpful demeanor.

♦ Nominated by Andrea Menefee
Funding Meals for Homebound
The County Board of Supervisors honored Paul Kraintz and members of Meals on Wheels of Contra Costa, pictured at right, last month on the organization’s 20th anniversary. Meals on Wheels of Contra Costa raises and contributes more than $950,000 each year to subsidize 300,000 nutritious daily meals and 15,000 emergency meals delivered to more than 2,000 homebound elders by the county Meals on Wheels Program. For more information, visit its website at www.mealsonwheelsofcontracosta.org

HazMat Prepares ConFire for Initial Response to Toxic Spills
If there’s a hazardous materials accident in Contra Costa, our Hazardous Materials team might not be first on scene. That’s why Hazardous Materials Specialists Maria Duazo and Paul Andrews recently trained 240 Contra Costa County Fire District employees how to detect and react to hazardous material spills. The firefighters are required to take the refresher course every year, but this is the first year it was taught by people from our Hazardous Materials Division. In the past, our staff has taught courses to the Sheriff’s Office, local fire departments and Public Works. Maria said it is important for other agencies to know how to initially and safely respond to a hazardous materials accident since our county is the second-most industrialized county in the state, with more than 17 billion pounds of registered hazardous materials.

To find out more about hazardous materials in Contra Costa, visit www.cchealth.org/groups/hazmat/

Health Care Workers as Creators
Dr. Alan Siegel, above right, performs the world premiere of “A Bad Case of Havin’ the Flu” with his band The Rhythm Method during the sixth annual Health Care Workers as Creators event Sept. 29 at our Contra Costa Regional Medical Center. Left, Information Architect Marc Miyashiro looks at visual art created by Health Services staff. The annual evening of art and music featured visual and performance art by our employees. To see more photos from the event, visit isite. See a video of the flu song at www.cchealth.org/topics/flu/
New COO for CCRMC, Health Centers

Michael Anaya has been named the new Chief Operations Officer of Contra Costa Regional Medical Center and Health Centers Division. He has led health care organizations for more than 30 years within for-profit and nonprofit entities, most recently as Chief Operating Officer/Vice President of Health Operations, Mystikal Solutions, a national Information Systems organization. Michael was CEO of Colorado Plains Medical Center and is also a 22-year veteran (enlisted in the Air Force and commissioned as a Medical Service Corps officer, United States Navy). Michael brings a breadth of knowledge and experience to Health Services. He will report directly to CCRMC and Health Centers CEO Anna Roth.

Combined Charities Campaign Launches

Today kicks off the start of the Combined Charities campaign. Employees can choose to donate to a variety of nonprofit organizations that provide assistance to those in need. Among the organizations from which to choose are several related to Health Services, including the Regional Medical Foundation and Meals on Wheels of Contra Costa. Last year, Health Services employees pledged more than $250,000. The drive runs through the end of this month, October 31.

If you haven’t received a form contact your Division Coordinator or Department Coordinator Jackie Peterson at 925-957-5420.

Mental Health Prepares for Emergencies with More Than 300 Kits

Our Mental Health Division is now better prepared to serve after disaster strikes. The division distributed more than 300 three-day emergency kits last month to all its offices. The purpose is to build resiliency and be prepared to serve clients in an emergency, said Jan Gordon, a Mental Health Clinic Coordinator. The kits are stored in secure places and can be accessed by a designated worksite safety coordinator. Jan has been working on the project with Mental Health Director Donna Wigand along with assistance from EMS Emergency Preparedness Manager Dan Guerra and Marcelle Indelicato of the Office of Emergency Services. Mental Health also placed 440 MHz radios in all county Mental Health clinics and programs. In addition to the radio test conducted by Emergency Medical Services throughout our Department every month, Mental Health conducts internal drills on a designated Mental Health channel.

Find emergency preparedness tips online at www.cchealth.org/topics/emergencies/
Director’s Report

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New Data Collection System Supports Inclusive Care

There’s a new way to collect data that will make it easier for Health Services to comply with upcoming federal mandates and to reduce health disparities. The collected data, known as REALism data, provides accurate and valid patient demographic information. The system is built into the E2search application, which is currently used by many employees to check a person’s financial eligibility, medical record requests, primary care physician and more. The team that developed the prototype included Assistant IT Director Sam Khan, IT staff Bhumil Shah, Steve Dinning, Siu Wing Tong and Paul Crosby, and Health Plan Linguistic and Cultural Services Manager Otilia Tuitin. REALism data collects a person’s preferred oral and written languages, race and ethnicity. Our Mental Health Division is also using the system to pilot the collection of sexual orientation and gender identity data. Otilia has led the way in piloting and refining the REALism data collection application in our Health Plan, which went live with the system September 7. Steve said that making this data accessible would support our medical staff in providing appropriate linguistic access and culturally appropriate care for our patients as well as supporting our staff in quality improvement efforts. Health Services Director Dr. William Walker recently recognized all team members for their work.

To view a screenshot of REALism data collection please go to the Reducing Health Disparity page on iSITE. For more information about REALism, contact Sam Khan at 925 313-6703.

East County Project Homeless Connect Helps Hundreds of Struggling Individuals

Hundreds of people gathered at the County Fairgrounds in Antioch last month to receive services that would help end their homelessness. The people were attending Project Homeless Connect, an annual one-day event sponsored by our Homeless Program. This year’s event was co-sponsored by the City of Antioch. People were given health and housing information, social services, identification cards and much more. At least 850 people attended this year’s event, including 154 families with children. Homeless Program Director Cynthia Belon said as many as 15,000 people in Contra Costa experience homelessness every year. She said that the number of chronic homeless individuals has decreased, but the number of families who are newly homeless has increased.

To find out more about our Homeless Program, visit www.cchealth.org/groups/homeless/ or call 925-313-6736.