One Year of the Affordable Care Act

We celebrated last month the first anniversary of passage of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), the historic health insurance reform law that will provide new universal health insurance for most residents. This is an event that has been long in coming and discussed by various presidents and congressional representatives dating back to the Truman era.

The ACA is now having an impact on the residents of Contra Costa—allowing children to stay on their parents’ insurance until age 26, preventing children with pre-existing conditions from being denied health insurance, eliminating copays for preventive care, providing relief to Medicare beneficiaries for the cost of medications, and providing tax credits for small businesses that provide health insurance to their employees. We are directly seeing an impact for our own employees as their children are able to maintain their health insurance until age 26.

More importantly, as we discussed in last month’s Director’s Report, low-income residents are being enrolled in the Low Income Health Plan (LIHP). In 2014, most enrollees will be eligible for Medi-Cal with 100% federal funding. This obviously will have a positive impact on state and county budgets. ACA invests in health care delivery system improvements and structures payment models that reward quality and efficiency. These changes will help to ensure that we will all receive high quality, cost effective and seamless care.

Community health, prevention and collaboration

I also want to emphasize a number of other major issues that ACA addresses, such as the fact that we need to go upstream outside hospitals, clinics and doctor’s offices into the community prevention programs to help people maintain their health. We need to engage in collaborative efforts that will improve school nutrition, eliminate pediatric obesity, embrace the built environment, provide safe spaces for people to exercise and a number of other initiatives must be taken to turn the curve on disparities, health outcomes and rising health costs. We must focus on improving health at both the individual and population levels. For example, if residents don’t walk because they don’t have safe parks and walking trails in their neighborhoods, steps must be taken to address these concerns. We know that walking could improve outcomes for diabetes, hypertension, heart disease and other chronic diseases. Small collaborative efforts such as this can improve the health of our communities.
ACA must not be repealed

However, in the celebration of this momentous legislative achievement, I have grave concern about current attempts to repeal the ACA or to undermine its funding and implementation. The House Committee on Energy and Commerce is already taking steps to defund some provisions of the law that will fund the establishment of state health exchanges, prevention and public health trust fund, capital investments in school-based health centers, personal responsibility education programs and more. During a health reform event on March 22, Congressman George Miller described attacks to dismantle this law as “insane,” and a number of residents shared their stories about the wonderful impact the ACA has had on them and their families. (See photo from event on Page 3 and visit our Facebook page for a video of event.)

Congressman Miller was instrumental in formulating and passing the ACA, and knows firsthand the benefits both locally and nationally to our communities. It would be a shame to see all of Congressman Miller’s and others’ efforts to pass a law that will benefit so many individuals and families overturned. I believe it is incumbent on all of us to stand up and shout out against the attacks on this law. There is nothing more important to the future of our own health system than the preservation of the ACA.

Moving to the state budget woes

We know that $12 billion of cuts to state programs have been proposed by Governor Jerry Brown and are now being approved by the legislators. Many programs are slated to be cut, including child welfare, child care, mental health, substance abuse and Medi-Cal. There also is a major effort to move the responsibility of state prisoners to counties. These proposals will be painful, but will be necessary as a first step because there is another $12 billion in cuts that are yet to be described. The only way to ward off the next round of devastating cuts is for the voters of California to go to the polls and decide whether to extend current vehicle license fees, sales and income taxes.

Voters must have a right to decide

I believe it is appropriate for voters to have a chance to decide whether to extend these existing taxes. For this to happen, ballot measures must be developed and approved in order to be placed on the ballot. It is my hope that we will have a chance to cast our vote, possibly as early as June, to prevent the unfathomable impact on our most vulnerable residents if these taxes are not extended. Cutting an additional $12 billion in services to our children, elderly and disabled low-income residents can be avoided if we simply continue to pay taxes that we currently pay. The essence of our democracy is allowing us to decide our own fate through the ballot process. We can each demand that our legislature permit this issue to be placed on the ballot and let this issue be decided by the people

Sincerely,

William Walker, M.D.

Vending Machines Update

We are working hard on planning and implementing the 100% healthy vending machine policy. Because there are lots of details involved, installation of the machines has been pushed back. We are making great progress on this new exciting policy. Please share your ideas with us at 925-313-6808 and look to isite for more updates.

The Director’s Report is published monthly. Deadline for the May edition is April 15. 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 kate.fowlie@hsd.cccounty.us. The Director’s Report is available online at http://cchealth.org/groups/health_services/ and on iSite at http://cchs/
Hazardous Materials Staff Hold Drill to Practice Chlorine Gas Release Response

Our Hazardous Materials Division recently held a drill simulating a large chlorine gas release from a facility in Contra Costa County. The purpose of the drill was for staff to practice using protective gear and to coordinate with other agencies. Staff suited up in a fully encapsulating Level A suit to mitigate the simulated chlorine gas release. In addition, HazMat worked closely with our Emergency Services Division and the Contra Costa Sheriff’s Office to simulate a shelter-in-place order and activation of the Telephone Emergency Notification System. Our HazMat Division is the primary Hazardous Materials Response Team for the majority of Contra Costa County. HazMat Director Randy Sawyer said the Division routinely conducts drills to prepare for hazardous materials, exercise technical skills and increase coordination with other agencies.

For more information about our Hazardous Materials Division’s chlorine gas drill, contact Matt Kaufmann at matt.kaufmann@hsd.cccounty.us or 925-335-3235.

EMT Creates New Disaster Service Worker Training Plan for Health Services Employees

The recent earthquake in Japan and the ensuing tsunami are grim reminders of what could happen locally. If disaster struck Contra Costa, we, as county employees, must think about our families as well as our roles as disaster service workers. Our Emergency Management Team recently developed a training plan that lists skills all Health Services staff should have in the event of an emergency. The plan has four levels of training depending on your role in Health Services. Emergency Services Manager Kim Cox said our department’s response depends on the readiness of our employees. She said that regularly reviewing plans and practicing procedures is the best way to prepare for an actual emergency.

Health Reform One Year Later

Health Services Director Dr. William Walker, right, joined U.S. Rep. George Miller last month to mark health care reform’s one-year anniversary at the Concord Senior Center. To find out how health reform affects Contra Costa, visit www.cchealth.org/topics/reform/

For a copy of the new Emergency Preparedness Training Plan, visit iSITE or contact Kim Cox at kim.cox@hsd.cccounty.us or 925-333-6648. For more emergency preparedness information, visit www.cchealth.org/topics/emergencies/
Medical Home Pilot Showing Impressive Results at Richmond Health Center
The pilot team at our Richmond Health Center has been conducting trial runs of an improved medical home with an enhanced care team to support patient panels. A patient panel is a group of people assigned to one primary care provider. Ambulatory Care Medical Director Dr. Chris Farnitano said trials of the new model are showing impressive results. Patient issues that previously averaged two to three days to address are now handled the same day. In addition, fewer patient care needs are requiring the involvement of the primary care provider. Dr. Farnitano said the Richmond team, which includes Licensed Vocational Nurse Alesia Berry, Care Coordinator Seng Boungnasith and Dr. Krista Farey, is continuing to refine and test the model for longer trials over the next few weeks. As part of the pilot, the team streamlined the medication refill process. After testing the new process, patients only had to request a refill once. Previously, up to 30% of all medication requests were repeat requests. This streamlined refill model is currently being expanded to the rest of the Richmond Health Center.

To find out more about this pilot project, contact Dr. Chris Farnitano at chris.farnitano@hsd.cccounty.us

Mental Health Division Unveils Plan to Improve Care, Reduce Health Disparities
Our Mental Health Division recently released its comprehensive cultural competency plan, which intends to improve care for those we serve. The plan was produced by the Division’s Reducing Health Disparities workgroup, which is structured around the guiding principles of Health Services’ RHD Initiative. The workgroup consists of county staff, contract providers, consumers and consumer family members. The workgroup is split into seven sub-workgroups. Examples of the sub-workgroups include Linguistic Access, Inclusion Initiative (LGBTQ) and a Partnership with Multicultural Communities. The plan will provide Mental Health with best strategies to implement programs, practices and activities in order to reduce identified disparities. Strategies in the plan include increasing language capacity, growing a multicultural workforce, training all staff on cultural competence topics, and more. The workgroup is also working on a policy to guide the division on cultural competency training.

To find out more about this plan, contact Imo Momoh at imo.momoh@hsd.cccounty.us or 925-957-5239.
Discount Cards Rack Up the Savings in First Year

The free discount card rolled out one year ago this month saved Contra Costa residents more than $750,000 on prescription medication in its first 10 months. Our Contra Costa Health Plan implemented the Coast2Coast Rx card last April to help uninsured and underinsured residents afford their medications. CCHP Chief Operations Officer Judi Louro said the card is used to fill an average 2,700 prescriptions each month, and that number is growing. In January, the card was used to fill 3,713 prescriptions for a total of $117,159 in savings. CCHP CEO Patricia Tanquary said the card is especially useful for seniors who fall in the Medicare Part D doughnut hole, when an annual set dollar amount has been spent on medication and the individual must pay full price. As of January, the card raised more than $16,223.75 to help CCHP cover the cost of providing medical care to the uninsured.

To download the card in English or Spanish, visit www.coast2coastrx.com/contracostaca or visit a participating pharmacy.

EMS Pediatric and Neonatal Plan Popular on National Level

A new plan and toolkit developed by our Emergency Medical Services and made publicly available in February is now upheld at the national level. The Pediatric and Neonatal Disaster and Medical Surge Plan and Toolkit is one of the top 10 most viewed documents of all the pediatric documents posted on FEMA’s Lessons Learned Information Sharing website, www.llis.gov. The website displays emergency and disaster best practices. Interim EMS Director Patricia Frost said the plan will improve our county’s ability to care for infants and children in the event of a medical surge or disaster. She said successful neonatal and pediatric preparedness relies on a strong network of committed public health agencies, emergency medical services, hospitals and communities. The plan and toolkit aim to provide the essential foundation to build an effective infrastructure of sustainable neonatal and pediatric disaster preparedness.

To find out more about the plan, contact Patricia Frost at patricia.frost@hsd.cccounty.us or 925-313-9554. To view the plan, visit www.cchealth.org/groups/ems/

Medi-Cal Presentation

Contra Costa Health Plan Marketing Manager Wendy Mailer, left, and Community Outreach Representative José Ochoa were among CCHP staff who attended a workshop last month to help seniors and persons with disabilities learn about upcoming Medi-Cal changes. In the coming year, most seniors and persons with disabilities will need to switch to a Medi-Cal health plan. Find out more about the changes at http://dhcs.ca.gov/SPDInfo
State Scientist Tapped for Environmental Health Director

Marilyn Underwood, a veteran of the California Department of Public Health, has been named the new Director of our Environmental Health Division. Marilyn is a Registered Environmental Health Specialist and has a PhD in Comparative Pharmacology and Toxicology. At the CDPH, Marilyn served in a variety of roles, including Chief Research Scientist Supervisor. Hazardous Materials Director Randy Sawyer, who has acted as interim Director of Environmental Health, will transition to Chief Environmental Health and Hazardous Materials Officer. In this role, Randy will have overall responsibility for Environmental Health, Hazardous Materials and the Accidental Release Prevention Program. Health Services Director Dr. William Walker said this structure will provide more coordination between the programs, and responsiveness to the community, stakeholders and Board of Supervisors. We welcome Marilyn and congratulate Randy in his new role!

To reach Marilyn, email marilyn.underwood@hsd.cccounty.us

Jenssen Takes Helm of Communicable Disease Programs

Immunization Coordinator Erika Jenssen stepped into a new role last month to succeed Francie Wise as our Public Health Division’s new Communicable Disease Programs Manager. Erika will work closely with nurse managers and medical consultants to provide leadership and direction for Communicable Disease. She joined our Public Health Division as a student worker in 1987 and moved to full time in 1996 after completing her MPH in Health Policy and Administration. During the 1990s, Erika was part of the team that implemented our Immunization Registry, which became a model for the statewide registry. In addition to her role of Immunization Coordinator, Erika has worked in our AIDS Program and served as the Health Emergency Coordinator. Public Health Director Dr. Wendel Brunner said Erika has the management skills and demonstrated leadership to provide day-to-day direction as well as during communicable disease crises, like the H1N1 flu outbreak of 2009.

To reach Erika, email erika.jenssen@hsd.cccounty.us

Nominate People Who Combat Alcohol and Other Drugs in Contra Costa

Do you know someone who has made significant contributions to combating alcohol or other drugs abuse in Contra Costa County? The Alcohol and Other Drugs Advisory Board of Contra Costa County is accepting applications for its annual “People Who Make A Difference” awards. Nominations are being accepted for six categories. The Board of Supervisors will acknowledge award recipients at its regularly scheduled meeting May 17. A reception will follow. Nominations must be received by April 15. To see the criteria for nominations or to download the nomination form, visit www.cchealth.org/groups/aod_board/
Jaspreet Benepal, Charrise Brown, Roy Farase, Fernando Garcia, Robert Gzyl, Iris Holland, Anthony Longoria
Contra Costa Regional Medical Center
For their immediate response and team work to avert what could have resulted in the loss of our entire phone system at Contra Costa Regional Medical Center.
♦ Nominated by Anna Roth

Linda Black, PHN
Public Health
For consistently going above and beyond in all the services she has provided to fragile infants and their families in the Medically Vulnerable Infant Program, and in recognition of 34 dedicated years with Public Health.
♦ Nominated by Dawn Dailey

Itika Greene, NP, MPH
Public Health
For her visionary leadership over the past 20 years to bring perinatal services to the most underserved women in Contra Costa County, for embodying the framework, values and goals of a strength based approach in serving families, and for continuing to serve through volunteerism as the chair of the East County Black Expo.
♦ Nominated by Suzette Johnson

Mental Health Financial Counselors
(see iSITE for a list of names)
Mental Health
For their strong teamwork, flexibility and commitment to the clients and families they serve. For going the extra mile to assist each other to accomplish their goals. For their ability to communicate well and offer assistance to each other without hesitation.
♦ Nominated by Cassandra Kolto

Ed Tonningsen
Volunteer
Mental Health
For generously sharing his skill, expertise, and compassion through 18 years of volunteer service with the Senior Peer Counseling Program and for his sense of integrity, hope for a better community, compassion, advocacy to maintain the program, and tireless belief in possibility.
♦ Nominated by Ken Salonen

Jocelyn Habal
Supervising Environmental Health Specialist
Environmental Health
For being a leader and liaison with the community, City of Richmond, police and code enforcement on issues regarding vendor permit issues. For coordinating efforts to create “Vendors without Permits” pamphlets and for her overall hard work.
♦ Nominated by Diana Kato

Staff
Environmental Health
For working together as a team to meet inspection goals in the food and pools programs and for their efforts and hard work during staff shortages and increased mandates.
♦ Nominated by Diana Kato
Perinatal Services Coordinator Retires

Perinatal Services Coordinator Itika Greene retired last month after almost 20 years. Itika helped expand Presumptive Eligibility Coverage, hire the first countywide Breastfeeding Promotion Specialist in California, create MCPOP, a perinatal data collection system, and more through promoting Health Equity. Itika’s work with the Promoting Smoke-Free Families Program helped many pregnant women find help through the California Smoker’s Helpline. She also helped obtain health care for incarcerated pregnant women and their newborns.

WIC Director Retires

Women, Infants & Children Program Director Beverly Clark retired last month after 37 years with Health Services. Beverly Clark joined CCHS when the WIC program formed in 1974. Since she began, WIC’s monthly caseload has increased from zero to 22,875. Beverly also has served as California WIC Association’s Board President, Secretary and Regional Representative. She has been an elected board member of the State WIC Task Force. Beverly has worked tirelessly on smoking cessation, obesity and anemia prevention, tooth decay, perinatal depression and breastfeeding.

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

Service Excellence nomination forms are available at www.cchealth.org and iSite from any CCHS computer.

April Milestones

Congratulations to these employees who have given us long years of service: Linda L. Whalen, Sherralyn A. Bradley, Maureen T. Fix, Alan Ly, Marylou Tafoya, Diana M. Carpio, Linda I. Pickron, Tamara K. Weingarten, Deborah J. Sams-Usatin, Barbara J. Carr, Wynn H. Esclavon, Bertha A. Mena, Ana D. Pineda, Matthew Luu, Veronica R. Perez, Debra L. D'Angelica, Joanna S. Greenwood, Scott A. Hanson (10 years); Shideh Ataii, Leticia Schneider, Martha A. Flores, Edmund L. Orozco, Cynthia A. Easton, Fernando Garcia, Joy E. Wright (15 years); Kimberly C. Miller, Patricia L. Hill, Vicki A. Turner, Thomas E. Gamsky, Judith E. Whitworth, Deborah L. Curtis, Gilbert Soberal, Daniel M. Guerra (20 years); Rusty Keilch, Gregory Lawler, Psyche Murillo and Rosalind R. Walker (25 years).