

SCMA News Briefs

The monthly newsletter of the
Sonoma County Medical Association
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April 2009

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Nominations sought for Partnership Health Plan board of directors

Partnership HealthPlan of California (PHC), a County Organized Health System charged with operating the Managed Medi-Cal program in Solano, Napa and Yolo counties, is scheduled to begin operating in Sonoma County this October. At that time, PHC will assume care management responsibility for almost 50,000 Medi-Cal beneficiaries in the county.

For the past three years, PHC has been working with a Planning Group appointed by the Sonoma County Department of Health Services to implement Managed Medi-Cal in the county. The SCMA representative on the Planning Group is Dr. Kirk Pappas.

As part of the implementation plan for Sonoma County, PHC will soon expand its board of directors to 22 members and provide Sonoma County with seven board seats. **The Planning Group has requested that SCMA identify a physician for consideration as a nominee to the PHC board. This is a very important position, as the director will represent all Sonoma County physicians on the board that will control how the Medi-Cal Managed Care program is administered.**

The nominee will be submitted for consideration to Rita Scardaci, director of the Sonoma County Department of Health Services. She will submit the final recommendations to the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors for approval.

Important considerations for identifying candidates include the ability to:

* Travel to Fairfield for board meetings on a monthly basis (evenings, fourth Wednesday of the month).

* Carry out the fiduciary responsibilities of the board in meeting the health care needs of Medi-Cal recipients in all counties served by PHC.

The SCMA board of directors is hereby requesting nominations for the PHC board position. **Applicants should submit a letter of interest and a CV to SCMA by April 30.** Applicants should also indicate if they are interested in participating in a PHC board subcommittee. For more information about PHC, visit www.partnershiphp.org.

Applications should be submitted by mail, fax or e-mail to SCMA Executive Director Cynthia Melody at the address below. For questions, call her at 525-4359.

Cynthia Melody
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3033 Cleveland Ave. #104
Santa Rosa, CA 95403
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Public Health urges increased vaccinations for local children

Sonoma County's childhood vaccination rates, already among the lowest in California, have become front-page news. Recent reports indicate that vaccination rates in some local private schools are as low as 24%, with certain public districts reporting rates as low as 54%.

A major cause of the low rates appears to be the "personal belief exemptions" (PBEs) that parents can sign to exempt their children from vaccinations. Many parents are signing PBEs because they fear vaccines can cause autism—a theory that has long since been discredited.

"Vaccines are safe and they don't cause autism," said Deputy Public Health Director Dr. Mark Netherda. He urged local physicians to present the facts about vaccines, along with this stark reminder:

"The diseases that these vaccines prevent can kill your child."

Childhood vaccines are used to prevent more than a dozen once-common contagious diseases, including measles and pertussis.

Netherda, who has an article about the county's low vaccination rates in the current issue of *Sonoma Medicine*, said the situation is becoming more acute. "We are seeing these diseases in Northern California," he noted. "They are on the rise because people aren't vaccinating."

Public Health is developing a plan to improve immunization rates and will probably hold a stakeholder meeting on the topic later this spring. Patient-education materials about vaccines are available from the CDC at www.cdc.gov and from the American Academy of Pediatrics at www.aap.org.

SCMA NEWS *****

RSVP now for SCMA Wine & Cheese Reception on May 28

All SCMA members and their spouses or guests are invited to SCMA's annual Wine & Cheese Reception on Thursday evening, May 28. This year's reception will be hosted by Dr. Richard and Julie Andolsen at their private vineyard near Healdsburg. The event offers a wonderful opportunity to gather with colleagues in a relaxed, convivial setting.

In addition to cheese and Andolsen Vineyard wines, the reception includes an informal alfresco dinner. There is no cost for SCMA members and their spouses or guests; the cost for nonmembers is \$35 per person.

Reservations are required. To RSVP (and receive the address), contact Rachel Pandolfi at rpandolfi@scma.org or 525-4375.

Reminder: Medicare billing seminar in Santa Rosa on April 7

Registration is still open for the Palmetto GBA Medicare billing seminar in Santa Rosa on April 7. All staff involved with Medicare billing are urged to attend.

The seminar will run from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. on Tuesday, April 7, in the Vesalius Room at the Sutter Medical Center of Santa Rosa. The address is 3325 Chanate Rd.

To register, visit www.PalmettoGBA.com/J1B and click on the "Learning and Education" tab. Please note that registration for the seminar must be completed through Palmetto, not SCMA.

Sign up for CMA Legislative Day and Leadership Academy

There's still time to sign up for CMA's Legislative Day on April 14, and for their Leadership Academy on April 24-26. Both events help get physicians more involved in the all-important political process.

On Legislative Day, physicians from across the state will gather in Sacramento to hear Attorney General Jerry Brown and others discuss health care policy in a series of morning and luncheon briefings. During the afternoon, SCMA members will be able to meet face-to-face with legislators from Sonoma County.

CMA provides all Legislative Day meals and conference materials free of charge. **To RSVP, contact Rachel Pandolfi at 525-4375 or rpandolfi@scma.org.** SCMA will coordinate carpools.

The Leadership Academy, which offers 17.5 hours of CME, will be held April 24-26 at the Disneyland Hotel in Anaheim.

Topics include health system reform in a new era of Washington politics; the "medical home" and other emerging models for delivering quality care; the promises and perils of hospital EHR initiatives; and health disparities.

The cost is just \$745 for SCMA members or \$1,045 for nonmembers. Reduced rates are available for staff and for single-day tickets. To register, call 800-795-2262 or visit www.caleadershipacademy.com.

SCMA Alliance sponsors two fundraisers during May

The SCMA Alliance will be busy raising funds for local nonprofits during May.

On May 9, Team Alliance will participate in the annual Human Race, which raised more than \$1 million for charity last year. Funds raised by Team Alliance will fund breast cancer awareness, safety for school-aged children, and health promotion programs.

Physicians and staff can support Team Alliance by signing up to participate in the race or helping at the Team Alliance booth. To sign up, contact Ann Hurd at 537-1031 or annhurd08@comcast.net or Kathleen Cortez at 483-4953 or kkcortez@sonic.net.

For the less athletically inclined, the Alliance is also sponsoring their annual Garden Tour in Sonoma on May 15 and 16. Participants can take self-guided tours of five spectacular private gardens, enroll in gardening workshops, and participate in a raffle whose prizes includes dinners at Cyrus or the Farmhouse Inn.

Tickets for the Garden Tour are just \$40; an optional lunch at Meritage Restaurant is \$22. To purchase tickets, visit www.scmaa.org or call Janet Shane at 578-4537.

STATE AND NATIONAL NEWS

Physicians need to comply with identity theft rules by May 1

Despite objections from organized medicine, the Federal Trade Commission has ruled that physicians who regularly bill their patients for services (including copayments and coinsurance) are considered "creditors" and must develop

and implement written identity theft prevention programs for their practices by May 1. The so-called Red Flag Rules are required for all financial institutions and creditors.

CMA has argued that the Red Flag Rules impose an unnecessary burden on physician practices, which often operate under strained conditions. CMA also notes that HIPAA already imposes strict requirements to safeguard patient information. Until further notice, however, physicians should begin to plan their Red Flag compliance programs.

CMA will be hosting a live webinar on April 16 from 12:30 to 1 p.m. to help members understand and comply with the Red Flag Rules. To register, visit www.cmanet.org/calendar. CMA will also be posting a toolkit on www.cmanet.org to help physicians develop and implement identity theft detection programs.

CMA Files Class Action Suit Against WellPoint

CMA has joined with other state medical groups and the AMA to file a class action lawsuit against WellPoint. The lawsuit alleges that WellPoint colluded with United Health Group on a price-fixing scheme that relied on an obscure database to set artificially low reimbursement rates for out-of-network care.

"Health insurers are data manipulating to set rates artificially low, forcing patients to pay more than they bargained for when they go to a doctor of their choice," said Dr. Dev GnanaDev, CMA president.

WellPoint, which operates as Blue Cross in California, is legally bound to pay the "usual and customary rates" (UCR) for care provided to their enrollees by an out-of-network physician. To determine UCR rates, WellPoint uses a database run by Ingenix, a company owned and operated by United Health Group.

A recent investigation by New York Attorney General Andrew Cuomo

concluded that the Ingenix data is intentionally manipulated to allow health plans to shortchange reimbursements on medical bills. WellPoint agreed to pay \$10 million to help fund a new database run by an independent nonprofit organization to replace Ingenix. The company also agreed to quit feeding data into Ingenix and use the new system once it is up and running.

The class action suit has been filed because the settlement with Cuomo did not seek redress for patients and doctors. "CMA," said Dr. GnanaDev, "will continue fighting to obtain relief for patients and physicians who were harmed by the systemic flaws of the conflict-ridden Ingenix database."

Three health-related propositions on May 19 special election ballot

Election-weary Californians have yet another set of ballot propositions to wade through, thanks to the state's historic budget agreement earlier this year. A special election set for May 19 will include six budget measures, three of which are related to health care.

Proposition 1A would direct the state to spend any excess revenue on education, the Budget Stabilization Fund, and paying off debt, in that order. Because health care funding is unprotected, the proposal could result in further cuts to Medi-Cal and Healthy Families.

Proposition 1D would redirect cigarette tax funds from First 5 commissions to the state's general fund. The proposal could hamper local First 5 programs for children's services but might benefit state-level programs.

Proposition 1E would redirect taxes on the wealthy from an account targeted for mental health programs to the general fund. As with Proposition 1D, the results are likely to be mixed, with some mental health programs benefitting and others not.

PEOPLE

Dr. Mark Sloan reads from his new book at Copperfield's on April 3

Dr. Mark Sloan, a pediatrician at Kaiser Santa Rosa, will read from his newly published book, *Birth Day*, at Copperfield's Books in Santa Rosa's Montgomery Village at 7 p.m. on Friday, April 3. The subtitle of the book gives a good idea of its contents: "A pediatrician explores the science, the history, and the wonder of childbirth."

A longtime member of the SCMA Editorial Board, Dr. Sloan has written many articles and editorials for *Sonoma Medicine*, including the editorial for the current issue on children's health.

Drs. Rosa and Bernstein named to new posts at Palm Drive

Drs. Greg Rosa and Allan Bernstein are assuming new duties at Palm Drive Hospital. Dr. Rosa, a veteran family physician, is directing the hospital's new medical center, which will offer primary care to west county residents. Dr. Bernstein, former co-chief of neurology at Kaiser Santa Rosa, will direct a headache clinic for Palm Drive.

RESOURCES

Volunteers needed for Neighbors in Health

Last year, more than 500 children participated in Neighbors in Health, a day-long event that provides medical care, immunizations, well checks and dental exams to uninsured and underinsured children. Organizers hope to serve even more children at this year's event, scheduled for August 2. To volunteer, visit www.unitedwaywinecountry.org/nih.

CLASSIFIEDS

Medical debts seminar - May 6

A three-hour seminar, "Collecting Medical Debts and Improving Credit Policies in Tough Times" will be held in Santa Rosa on May 6. The speaker is Robert Tavelli, president of the California Association of Collectors. Cost is \$79 (group discount available). To register call NCCS, Inc. - 707-528-4006.

Office equipment for sale

Exam tables, computers, desks, waiting room chairs, chart cabinets, folders, etc. Call Jennifer at 707-522-6200.

Free file cabinets

Two 4-drawer lateral file cabinets available free to good home. 42" wide, 54" high, 20" deep. Call Dr. Don van Giesen at 953-6763.

How to submit an ad

To submit a classified ad for News Briefs or Sonoma Medicine, contact Nan Perrott at nperrott@rhscommunications.com or 707-525-4226. The cost is one dollar per word.

ABOUT SCMA

The Sonoma County Medical Association, a 501(c)(6) nonprofit association, supports local physicians and their efforts to enhance the health of the community. Founded in 1858, SCMA is affiliated with the California Medical Association and the American Medical Association.

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