



SCMA News Briefs

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SONOMA COUNTY MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

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SCMA dinner attracts full house

The banquet room at the Vintner's Inn was completely full on Wednesday evening, Dec. 2, as SCMA honored a quartet of baby-boomer doctors, along with the residency program that trained many of the attendees. SCMA President Dr. Richard Powers emceed the event with alacrity, easily holding the attention of more than 150 doctors, spouses and guests.

The first award, for Outstanding Contribution to the Community, went to Dr. Walter Mills. Presenter Dr. Bob Schulz praised Mills for his kindness, compassion and energy in support of the residency program, the Northern California Center for Well-Being and many other local projects. Mills responded, "This award is about the past, but the future is what has me excited."

Jack Neureuter, CEO of Alliance Medical Center, presented the Outstanding Contribution to Sonoma County Medicine award to Dr. Jeff Sugarman, calling him "a combination of Peter Pan and the Pied Piper." Neureuter said the dermatology clinic Sugarman established at Alliance has become a model for specialty access throughout the county.

Former president Dr. Leonard Klay presented the Outstanding Contribution to SCMA award to Dr. Brad Drexler, calling him "a man of ideas" who has championed anti-smoking legislation and Medicare reform. In his acceptance speech, Drexler showed a flair for humor, offering two well-timed jokes.

Dr. Mark Sloan presented the Article of the Year award to Dr. Mark Netherda for "[Sonoma County's Lagging Immunization Rates](#)," which appeared in the Winter 2009 issue of Sonoma Medicine. Netherda urged the audience to stop being "polite noddors" in the immunization debate and become stronger advocates for immunizing all their patients.

Dr. Rick Flinders concluded the evening by presenting the Special Award for Recognition of Achievement to the Santa Rosa Family Medicine Residency Consortium, a now-disbanded group that helped preserve the residency. He called the Consortium "an idea whose time had come, and then, like a shooting star, had gone again."

Flu Shot Saturday set for December 5th

Flu Shot Saturday—which is targeted to low-income, underinsured and uninsured patients—will proceed as planned from 9 a.m. to noon on Saturday, Dec. 5. Both seasonal and H1N1 shots will be given, but the supply is limited. Some people may be turned away, depending on availability of vaccines. Children under 18 must be accompanied by a parent or guardian.

Seasonal shots can be given to any individual over 6 months old, including pregnant women, but there are several priority groups for receiving H1N1 vaccine.

The suggested donation is \$10, but no one will be turned away due to inability to pay. The shots will be offered at locations throughout the county. For a complete list, visit www.sonoma-county.org/flu or call 707-565-4477.

SCMA to assist with primary care survey

SCMA, which maintains an extensive database on all local physicians, will be a key player in an upcoming survey of primary care capacity, innovations and shortages. The survey is being conducted by the Primary Care Workgroup, one of several groups formed by the Sonoma County Department of Health Services to improve community health for county residents.

The workgroup, chaired by Dr. Bo Greaves, will use the SCMA database to contact primary care physicians regarding their practice capacity and the degree to which they have adopted patient-centered care innovations. The workgroup will also collect data required to designate any Primary Care Health Professional Shortage Areas, which may be eligible for federal funding.

The survey results will be used to develop recommendations for ensuring primary care capacity and promoting patient-centered care.

PFMC awards nearly \$25,000 to four North Bay projects

The Pacific Foundation for Medical Care has awarded nearly \$25,000 in grants to four North Bay health projects. The grants are given twice a year to support projects that enhance the availability or quality of health services in counties served by PFMC. The latest grants were given to:

- **SCMA Health Careers Scholarship Committee** to fund scholarships for students pursuing medical careers.

- **Northern California Center for Well-Being** (Santa Rosa) for childhood obesity prevention programs.
- **Sonoma County Academic Foundation for Excellence in Medicine** (Santa Rosa) to support strategic planning and faculty development for the Santa Rosa Family Medicine Residency.
- **Coastal Health Alliance** (Pt. Reyes Station) to address risky behaviors among West Marin youth.

The next deadline for PFMC grant applications is April 2, 2010. Instructions on how to apply for the grants are posted on www.pfmc.org. PFMC, a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving patient access to physicians, includes many SCMA physicians in its provider network.

Buildings dominate November medical news

The ever-changing medical landscape in Sonoma County got a few more buildings in the foreground during November, even as the economic background continued its steady decline. Among the highlights:

- The **Veterans' Administration** opened a 21,000 square foot outpatient clinic near the Sonoma County airport. The facility, twice the size of the old VA clinic in Santa Rosa, includes more than a dozen exam and treatment rooms and will employ up to 70 medical providers, including physicians, dentists and physical therapists. At least 5,000 local veterans are expected to use the new clinic.
- Not to be outdone, the **Southwest Community Health Center** doubled the size of its clinic in southwest Santa Rosa and signed an agreement to buy a 40,000 square foot office building in the northeast corner of the city. The new facilities will allow Southwest to increase its patient base from about 25,000 to nearly 35,000.
- **St. Joseph Health System** bought a 60-bed convalescent facility across the street from Memorial Hospital. The hospital previously rented the building. Plans for the facility have yet to be announced.
- Instead of a building, the **Sutter Medical Foundation North Bay** bought the seven-physician Doyle Park Family Medicine group, whose offices are near Memorial. The purchase swelled the ranks of local Sutter physicians to 85. The Doyle Park group includes Drs. Renee Armstrong, Laurie Cederburg, Kathy Horan, Naomi McAuliffe, Gary McLeod, Amy Shaw and Larry Slater.
- **Kaiser Permanente** and the **Redwood Community Health Coalition** will be taking over responsibility for the Healthy Kids program, which was previously administered by Sonoma County. The change was prompted by decreased funding from the state and other sources. Healthy Kids serves about 8,000 local uninsured children.
- The **Kozel Stroke Institute** at Healdsburg Hospital received a Participation Award from the American Stroke Association for following specific guidelines in providing stroke care.

Three prominent local physicians die during November

Drs. John Shearer, Theodore Stashak and James West, all of whom had long careers in Sonoma County, died during November.

- **Dr. Shearer**, a family physician in Petaluma for more than four decades, was a passionate advocate for health care reform. In "[The Case for Single Payer](#)," published in *Sonoma Medicine* in 2003, he wrote, "It is no longer credible to maintain that the current system works; it is also no longer meaningful to proceed with modifications of a system that has failed." Among his many accomplishments, Dr. Shearer helped found the Children's Healthcare Access Coalition and volunteered at the Jewish Community Free Clinic. He was 77.
- At the opposite end of the political spectrum, **Dr. Stashak** was an ob-gyn in Santa Rosa from 1949 to 1990. He was a staunch supporter of the John Birch Society and served as president of the Sonoma County Taxpayers' Association. He delivered more than 10,000 babies and worked for many years with Dr. Alexis Maximov. Stashak was an avid cowboy and hunter, owning both a cattle ranch in Santa Rosa and a hunting preserve in Cloverdale. He was 91.
- **Dr. West** was a pediatrician in Petaluma for nearly 50 years. When he started his practice in the 1950s, he was the first and only pediatrician in town. He worked tirelessly during that era, even as he and his wife Gilly raised five children of their own. In 1972, Dr. Jeana Levinthal joined his practice; they worked together until both retired in 2004. West served on the board of Blood Bank of the Redwoods and Petaluma Valley Hospital. He was 85.

Blue Shield plans to publish physician ratings based on faulty data

Despite concerns expressed by CMA and an advisory panel, Blue Shield plans to publish physician rankings based on faulty data from the California Physician Performance Initiative (CPPI). Over the past two years, CPPI has used claims data from private PPO patients from Anthem Blue Cross, Blue Shield, and United Healthcare to measure physicians on a set of quality measures.

CMA has serious concerns with the validity and accuracy of the data that has been collected. Results of CPPI's own reconsideration process in 2009 found significant inaccuracies, with 33% of physician scores being overturned.

Because the CPPI program relies solely on claims data, it fails to comprehensively document the care a patient receives or the reasons why a patient may not receive care. For example, one physician reported that he was marked down for not recommending cervical cancer screening to patients who had undergone hysterectomies.

Nonetheless, Blue Shield is planning to give digital "blue ribbons" to physicians who scored in the top 50th percentile, and will possibly reopen the reconsideration process for physicians who are interested in improving their scores. Blue Shield plans to publish this information by the end of December.

CMA is working to dissuade Blue Shield from publishing the 2009 CPPI results, and to fix the flaws in the CPPI data-gathering process before moving forward with the project.

CMA opposes current version of Senate health reform bill

CMA, which supports health reform legislation passed last month by the House of Representatives, opposes the Senate health reform bill as currently written.

"There is no way health care reform can work if patients can't get access to a doctor," said CMA President Dr. Brennan Cassidy. "The Senate bill fails to fix major problems in Medicare and Medicaid, which currently suffer from chronic underfunding that undermines access."

Cassidy called for major improvements to both programs, including better funding. CMA is working with senators to draft amended legislation that meets these goals.

"California's physicians appreciate the support of senators and their sensitivity to critical issues affecting the well-being of patients and the doctors serving them," Cassidy said. "It's essential that the Senate's leadership adopt changes to help California and protect patients."

House passes Medicare reform bill; Senate action pending

Last month, the House of Representatives passed the Medicare Physician Payment Reform Act, which eliminates the Sustainable Growth Rate (SGR) formula that would have cut payments to physicians by 21% in 2010. Action in the Senate is still pending.

After the House vote, AMA President Dr. James Rohack issued a statement saying, "The AMA urges the Senate to act quickly before the cut begins on January 1. Fixing the Medicare physician payment formula once and for all is an essential element of comprehensive health reform. Congress needs to fulfill its current commitments as it considers expanding its obligations. Physicians must be assured of stable payments so they can continue to care for seniors, baby boomers and military families."

Red Flag Rule delayed again; bill introduced to exempt physicians

For the third time, the Federal Trade Commission has delayed enforcement of the Red Flag Rule, which requires some physician practices to develop and implement identity-theft detection and prevention programs. The rule is now scheduled to take effect next June.

Several factors appear to be causing the delays, including objections from organized medicine, accountants and attorneys. The American Bar Association recently won a lawsuit in federal court holding that the Red Flag Rule could not be applied to attorneys, a decision that may impact enforcement of the rule with physicians.

A bill (HR 3763) recently introduced in Congress would create an exemption for health organizations, including physician practices, with 20 or fewer employees.

State rejects expanding scope of practice for nonphysicians

The California Office of Administrative Law has rejected regulations proposed by the state Department of Public Health that would have expanded the scope of practice of psychologists and potentially all other health care practitioners working in licensed health care facilities.

CMA strongly opposed the regulations, which would have weakened medical staff self-governance rights and could have been interpreted to allow unqualified health care professionals to carry out the duties of a physician or surgeon.

The regulations would have allowed nonphysician practitioners to admit patients, perform medical examinations, place patients in restraints, complete medical records, coordinate care, and order transfers. The regulations would also have circumvented the self-governance rights of medical staffs to establish and enforce the rules, regulations, criteria and standards for medical staff membership and privileges.

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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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