



SCMA News Briefs

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SONOMA COUNTY MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

Newsletter Editor: Steve Osborn | Executive Director: Cynthia Melody

707-525-4325 | sosborn@scma.org | scma.org/news

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URGENT: Physicians need to contact legislators to support Medicare GPCI fix

Congressional leaders are expected to merge the House and Senate health care reform bills into one final bill during the next three weeks. CMA has sent a delegation to Washington, DC, to lobby for improvements, but needs your help to preserve the House bill's update of California's Medicare payment localities, also known as the "GPCI fix."

All physicians are urged to contact the senators and representatives listed below and tell them to update California's Medicare Physician Payment Locality borders by supporting the California GPCI fix in the House bill. Please make all the calls or e-mails you can. If you have only a few minutes, the top priorities are Sen. Feinstein, Sen. Boxer, and Rep. Pelosi. Every call or e-mail counts!

When contacting senators or representatives, give your name, specialty, city and county, and urge the senator or representative to support the California GPCI fix in the House bill. The GPCI fix will improve access to care in 14 California counties, including Sonoma. (For a sample e-mail and more information on the GPCI fix, visit the "Resources" page at scma.org.) When contacting Speaker Pelosi, Rep. Stark and Rep. Waxman, please also thank them for fighting for California physicians on this issue.

- **Sen. Dianne Feinstein.** Send an [e-mail](#) or use the AMA's grassroots hotline at 800-833-6354.
- **Sen. Barbara Boxer.** Send an [e-mail](#) or use the AMA's grassroots hotline at 800-833-6354.
- **Speaker Nancy Pelosi.** Send an [e-mail](#) or call 202-225-4965.
- **Rep. Henry Waxman.** Send an [e-mail](#) or call 202-225-3976.
- **Rep Pete Stark.** Send an [e-mail](#) or call 202-225-5065.
- **Rep. Mike Thompson.** Send an [e-mail](#) or call 202-225-3311.
- **Rep. Lynn Woolsey.** Send an [e-mail](#) or call 202-225-5161.

Final decisions are being made **now**. Please call **today!** Thank you!

Health Action needs primary care practices for learning collaborative by Jan. 22

By Bo Greaves, MD

Health Action of Sonoma County is organizing a learning collaborative of 8-12 diverse primary care practices from March through December this year. Each practice will be working on transforming how their office operates, and on becoming a patient-centered medical home. Each practice needs to commit to making improvements, and to sharing their experiences with all in the collaborative.

We anticipate that each of these practices, throughout 2010, will make substantial movement toward the goal of becoming a patient-centered medical home (PCMH), with significant improvements in patient access, patient safety, care coordination, and proven clinical quality. We also anticipate spreading this transformative process to other primary care practices in Sonoma County over the next 2-3 years.

If you are up to this challenge and ready to commit to active participation in the activities described here, PLEASE let us know immediately. We can only accept applications to participate until Jan. 22. The application is quick and easy to complete—but remember the commitment will involve hard work! For application materials or questions, contact Pamela Moore at pmoore@rchc.net or 792-7900, Ext. 202. You may also contact me at GREAVEL@sutterhealth.org or 408-2696.

The PCMH Collaborative will kick off on March 18-19 with a one-and-a-half-day learning session, with teams (clinician, office manager, back office staff) from each practice attending. At this session, all aspects of the PCMH will be explored, as will relationship-centered care and the chronic-care model. In addition, some basic tools for rapid office improvement will be taught. There will then be three half-day learning sessions, held every other month, focusing on specific aspects of how to make this fundamental change in our practices. We will end in December with an all-day meeting to review the progress of each practice and set the stage for continuing change and for expansion to other practices.

In between each session, the teams from each practice will be expected to carry out ongoing and continuous improvement projects, each one aimed at moving them closer to the goal of becoming a patient-centered medical home.

Again, for application materials or questions, contact Pamela Moore at pmoore@rchc.net or 792-7900, Ext. 202, or Dr. Bo Greaves at GREAVEL@sutterhealth.org or 408-2696.

SCMA membership continues to increase; Directory to publish in February

Despite all the turmoil in medicine locally and nationally, membership in SCMA continues to increase at a steady pace, growing 2% in the last year. To help keep track of all those new physicians, SCMA will be publishing the 2010 edition of its Sonoma County Physician Directory in February. The directory, a standard reference book for local medical offices, includes photos and complete specialty, address and training information for SCMA members, along with an alphabetical listing of almost all local physicians, various specialty indexes, and a guide to medical resources.

Each SCMA member receives one free copy of the directory. Additional copies cost \$30 for members, \$40 for nonmembers and health care facilities, and \$55 for all others. To order, visit scma.org/directory or contact Rachel Pandolfi at rachel@scma.org or 525-4375.

Latest issue of Sonoma Medicine examines "The Aging Brain"

The Winter 2010 of [Sonoma Medicine](#), mailed to members last week, focuses on "The Aging Brain," with articles by local physicians on new treatments for Parkinson's, risk factors for dementia, biomarkers for Alzheimer's, and a Santa Rosa "brain gym." Departments include a travelogue from the Galapagos and an article about restoring a classic car, as well as poetry and book reviews.

Each SCMA member receives one free copy of the magazine. Additional copies can be purchased at Sawyer's News or Copperfield's Books in Santa Rosa or Readers' Books in Sonoma.

Public Health offers free H1N1 vaccinations in Santa Rosa on Jan. 23

The Public Health department will be holding a free H1N1 vaccination clinic at the Sonoma County Fairgrounds from 2 to 7 p.m. on Saturday, Jan. 23. "H1N1 vaccine is widely available throughout the county, and virtually everyone over the age of 6 months should get vaccinated," said Deputy Health Officer Dr. Mark Netherda. He recommended that patients should first seek the vaccine from their medical providers or local pharmacies. Those who can't access the vaccines in these ways should attend the free vaccination clinic.

For up-to-date information on H1N1, visit sonoma-county.org/PublicHealth or call the Public Health Information Line at 565-4477.

Center for Well-Being presents healthy eating classes at G&G Supermarket

The Northern California Center for Well-Being will be presenting a series of healthy eating classes at the G&G Supermarket in Santa Rosa during January. Topics includes "Cooking for Your Weight" (Jan. 13), "Lower Your Cholesterol" (Jan. 20), "Cooking for Diabetes" (Jan. 27) and "Baby Food by Hand" (Jan. 29). Local physicians are encouraged to tell their patients about these classes, which are offered for a nominal fee. Patients can register by visiting gandgmarket.com or calling the Center for Well-Being at 575-6043.

Office of Education seeks judges for Science Fair

The Sonoma County Office of Education (SCOE) is seeking volunteers to serve as judges for their annual Science Fair, scheduled for Wednesday, Feb. 24, at the SCOE office on Skylane Blvd. in Santa Rosa. Each year, about 100 students in grades 6-12 exhibit scientific research projects at the fair, where their work is evaluated by qualified judges.

Physicians interested in serving as judges should contact Mike Roa at mroa@scoe.org or 522-3253, or Jill McIntyre at jmcintyre@scoe.org or 524-2816. You can also download and submit a volunteer form by searching for "Science Fair" at scoe.org. Volunteering requires about a half day and includes an orientation session, breakfast and lunch.

Hospital updates

Sonoma County hospitals have been much in the news of late. Among the top stories:

- **Santa Rosa Memorial Hospital** marks its 60th anniversary this year. The hospital opened Jan. 1, 1950, as a 90-bed facility with 93 employees and 70 doctors with privileges. Twelve patients were admitted on opening day. The number of beds has since increased to 278, the employees to 1,832, and the doctors with privileges to 470. During 2009, the hospital logged more than 12,000 inpatient visits and 170,000 outpatient visits. Its parent company, the St. Joseph Health System, is the county's largest private, nonprofit employer, with almost 2,400 employees altogether.
- **Signature Health Care** announced plans to open a 90-bed psychiatric hospital in Santa Rosa by 2011. The hospital, which will be located in a Fulton Road facility that Memorial Hospital closed during 2008, is expected to serve the inpatient psychiatric needs for several North Bay counties.
- The **Petaluma Health Center** will receive more than \$9 million in federal funding to expand its facilities. The expansion will allow the center to double its patient capacity, from 14,000 to as many as 30,000.
- **Healdsburg District Hospital** will sponsor student rotations for Sonoma State's new Direct Entry Masters of Science in Nursing (DEMSN) program. The new program is designed for students with a BA or higher degree in a field other than nursing. Graduates will receive an MSN degree.

Congress at the brink of health reform

After more than a year of debate, Congress is at the brink of passing historic legislation to expand health care coverage to millions of Americans. The final legislation will contain a number of provisions that CMA has been fighting to achieve for years, such as insurance industry reforms to protect patients, measures to make coverage more affordable for low-income families, as much as \$350 billion in physician payment fixes in Medicare and Medicaid, and increased funding for primary care, physician training, and wellness and prevention. Unfortunately, the legislation will also contain some provisions that CMA opposes.

House and Senate leaders are meeting over the next few weeks to reconcile the remaining differences between the House and Senate reform bills. Despite these differences, CMA fully expects that the House-Senate Conference Committee will have the votes to produce legislation that will pass both houses of Congress and be signed by the President as soon as the end of January.

Outstanding issues still remain that CMA believes must be addressed if the legislation is to deliver on its promise of increased access to care. Now is the last chance to improve the legislation on six critical issues:

Repealing the Medicare Sustainable Growth Rate. The current formula would cut funding by 40% in future years if left in place and would hurt senior citizens' ability to find a doctor to treat them. The viability of Medicare is crucial as millions of baby boomers retire and enter the program.

Eliminating or modifying the proposed Independent Payment Advisory Board (IPAB), which could slash spending and coverage options for senior citizens with little input from others.

Increasing Medicaid's low reimbursement rates. As it is, patients covered by Medi-Cal often struggle to find a doctor because rates are so low that only about one-third of the state's physicians participate in the program. Both bills dramatically expand eligibility, meaning up to 2 million more patients could enter Medi-Cal, further complicating access.

Updating the Medicare locality system to reflect changes in practice costs.

Ensuring that any physician quality reporting program is accurate, fair, and offers physicians an opportunity to correct mistakes in the data or process.

Ensuring patients have the right to privately contract with Medicare physicians.

You can get more information and details in CMA's [letter to the House-Senate Conference Committee](#), which is available on CMA's [health reform webpage](#).

Medicare switches from consultation codes to E&M codes; CMA offers billing guide

Despite strenuous objections from CMA and others in organized medicine, Medicare is no longer recognizing inpatient and outpatient consultation codes. Effective Jan. 1, physicians must instead bill using E&M codes from the Office and Other Outpatient Services, Initial Hospital Care, and Initial Nursing Facility sections of the 2010 CPT. While CMS has increased the work RVUs for new and established office visits, as well as initial hospital and nursing facility visits, these changes may result in significant losses for some practices.

The new policy—and the short notice—have already caused a great deal of confusion as physicians and billing managers try to make sense of the new rules.

To help you understand what the switch means, CMA has published a 4-page [billing guide](#) that includes an overview of the issue, a code crosswalk, and links to additional resources. The guide is available to CMA members only at [cmanet.org](#). (You may also request a copy by calling the CMA member help center at 800-786-4262.)

CMA members can get additional information and guidance on this issue through a [members-only webinar](#) with Palmetto Medical Director Arthur Lurvey, MD. Dr. Lurvey will answer physician questions and explain how to bill for these services in 2010 and beyond. This one-hour webinar begins Wednesday, Jan. 20, at 12:15 pm. Registration is free, but space is limited, so [reserve your space today](#). If you are unable to participate in the live webinar, it will be available for on-demand viewing beginning the following day.

Physicians who use a third-party billing service are urged to call their vendors to make sure they are aware and prepared for the rule change. Feel free to provide them with a copy of the CMA consult code crosswalk and [billing guide](#).

CMA is also surveying major payors in California to find out which of them plan to follow Medicare's lead and eliminate consults. Once we have gathered this data, we will make it available to members.

For additional questions about the new rules, call the CMA member help center at 800-786-4262 and ask to speak with a reimbursement specialist.

Yosemite Institute for primary care physicians March 26-28

The 59th annual Postgraduate Institute for primary care physicians will be held at the Yosemite Lodge in Yosemite National Park from March 26 to 28. Tuition is \$375 for physicians, \$300 for allied health professionals, and \$100 for medical students, interns or residents. The event qualifies for up to 16 hours of Category 1 credit. To register, visit fmms.org or call 559-224-4224.

Dr. George McClary dies

Dr. George McClary, a Santa Rosa family doctor with a passion for photographing fires, died in December at the age of 82. Originally from Chicago, McClary opened a private practice in Santa Rosa in 1958 and soon distinguished himself among local firefighters by being among the first responders to fire scenes. His photos were used for training by the Santa Rosa Fire Department, which made him an honorary fire chief in 1971. During his long career, McClary was a staunch advocate for mental health, helping to found the Sonoma County chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness. He retired in 1983.

APPLICANTS

Ronald Botelho, MD, Anesthesiology*, Pain Medicine, Cardiac Anesthesiology, 3536 Mendocino Ave., Santa Rosa 95403, 523-0616, Fax 523-0616, bluedr.ron@gmail.com, UC San Diego 1982

M. Kathryn Brown, MD, Pediatrics*, 3925 Old Redwood Hwy., Santa Rosa 95403, 566-5273, Fax 566-5292, Kathryn.M.Brown@kp.org, Univ Virginia 1993

Alicia Duenas, MD, Psychiatry*, 401 Bicentennial Way, Santa Rosa 95403, 571-3778, Fax 571-3799, Alicia.I.Duenas@kp.org, Univ Rochester 2004

Christopher Gaut, MD, Emergency Medicine, 401 Bicentennial Way, Santa Rosa 95403, 393-4800, Fax 393-4747, christoper.gaut@kp.org, UC Davis 1994

Anna Kogan, MD, Obstetrics & Gynecology, 500 Doyle Park Dr. #103, Santa Rosa 95405, 579-1102, Fax 579-1386, Rosalind Franklin Univ 2005

Kenneth Kurtz, MD, Allergy & Immunology*, Internal Medicine, 401 Bicentennial Way, Santa Rosa 95403, 393-4133, Fax 393-4560, Kenneth.M.Kurtz@kp.org, UC San Diego 1991

Daniel Loube, MD, Pulmonary Disease*, Critical Care Medicine*, Sleep Medicine*, 1165 Montgomery Dr., Santa Rosa 95404, 543-2910, Fax 544-2389, daniel.loube@stjoe.org, George Washington Univ 1987

Katie Noyes, MD, Family Medicine, 3320 Chanate Rd., Santa Rosa 95404, 547-2220, Fax 303-3318, Dartmouth Med Sch 2009

Daniel Santiago, MD, Family Medicine*, 144 Stony Point Rd., Santa Rosa 95401, 521-4500, Fax 544-4626, daniel.santiago@crihb.net

Thomas Shragg, MD, Pulmonary Disease*, Critical Care Medicine*, 401 Bicentennial Way, Santa Rosa 95403, 393-4610, Fax 393-4775, tshragg@pol.net, UC Davis 1975

Rami Turk, MD, Cardiovascular Disease, 3536 Mendocino Ave. #200, Santa Rosa 95403, 573-6166, Fax 573-6165, doctorturk@gmail.com, Emory Univ 2003

Jitesh Vasadia, MD, Cardiovascular Disease*, 401 Bicentennial Way, Santa Rosa 95403, 393-4006, Fax 393-4188, jitesh.v.vasadia@kp.org, Osmania Med Coll 1997

Laura Westerling, MD, Dermatopathology*, 401 Bicentennial Way, Santa Rosa 95403, 393-4112, Fax 393-4871, laura.n.westerling@kp.org, Univ Southern California 2003

Eric Williams, MD, Dermatology*, 401 Bicentennial Way, Santa Rosa 95403, 393-4112, Fax 393-4871, eric.a.williams@kp.org, Univ Southern California 2003

Jill Young, MD, Pediatrics*, 401 Bicentennial Way, Santa Rosa, 393-2091, Fax 393-4556, jill.young@kp.org, Mayo Med Sch 1988

* board certified

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Small suite available for reasonable rent. Three exam rooms, southeast Santa Rosa. Call Connie, 707-525-0211.

Medical Office Space

Suite available. Perkins Medical Center, Sonoma. 1800+/- square ft. \$2890/mo. 707-996-4519.

How to submit a classified ad

To submit a classified ad for SCMA 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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Santa Rosa, CA 95403

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