

# SCMA News Briefs

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The monthly newsletter of the  
Sonoma County Medical Association  
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## May 2009

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#### Guidelines for swine flu testing

As the swine flu situation continues to evolve, health officials in Sonoma County have asked providers to focus on the following types of patients for testing:

#### Hospitalized patients with ILI

(influenza-like illness) who do not have another diagnosis.

**Outpatients with ILI** in one or more of the following categories:

- \* Patient is a contact of a confirmed swine influenza A (H1N1) case.
- \* Patient is in a high-risk setting for transmission (e.g., school, prison).
- \* Patient is part of a cluster of people (like a family) with ILI (only one patient needs laboratory confirmation).
- \* Patient returned from Mexico or another area with a high number of confirmed cases of swine flu within 7 days of illness onset or cared for ill household members with this travel history.

For guidelines on submitting specimens, call the Sonoma County Public Health lab at 565-4711 or visit [sonoma-county.org/health/ph/](http://sonoma-county.org/health/ph/). For the latest official information on swine flu, visit the CDC website at [cdc.gov/swineflu](http://cdc.gov/swineflu) or California Public Health at [cdph.ca.gov](http://cdph.ca.gov).

#### Feds vow to raise Medicare rates in Sonoma County

A summit called in mid-April by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Rep. Sam Farr to address the long-standing Medicare geographic payment inequity in Sonoma and 11 other California counties concluded with a commitment from federal officials to tackle the problem this year.

"This is a welcome breakthrough on a problem that has reduced access to care for years," said CMA President Dev A. GnanaDev, MD. "As costs have risen in places like Santa Barbara and San Diego counties, Medicare reimbursements have not kept up, and that has resulted in fewer doctors being able to serve those patients."

The Medicare payment formula includes a geographic adjustment factor (GAF) that adjusts the payment rate for local geographic market conditions. The goal is to base physician reimbursement on the cost of providing care in a particular geographic region.

The formula calculates a GAF for every California county, and assigns each county to one of nine Medicare regions in the state, called payment localities. Because of rapid growth and development in recent years, physicians in some California counties, including Sonoma, have practice costs that are up to 10% greater than the average costs of other counties in their payment localities.

The Medicare summit included members of key House and Senate committees, along with representatives from CMA and Medicare. Participants acknowledged that something must be done about the payment inequities but stopped short of agreeing on a solution.

SCMA and CMA have spent much of the last decade exploring possible solutions to the Medicare reimbursement problem. Because federal law requires that geographic payment changes be budget neutral, CMA will only back a resolution that holds California's other rural counties harmless.

For more information, contact CMA Vice President Elizabeth McNeil at 415-882-3376 or emcneil@cmanet.org.

SCMA NEWS  
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### **Dr Catherine Gutfreund nominated as SCMA president-elect**

Dr. Catherine Gutfreund, a family medicine physician at Kaiser Santa Rosa, has been nominated by her colleagues as SCMA president-elect. Nominees for the board of directors include Drs. Brad Drexler, Phyllis Senter, Leonard Klay and Jose Morales. Nominees for the CMA delegation include Dr. Lela Emad and Drs. Senter, Klay and Gutfreund.

SCMA members will vote on the nominees in June. For more information, contact Cynthia Melody at cmelody@scma.org or 525-4359.

### **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.

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.

### **Still time to sign up for Human Race or SCMA Alliance Garden Tour**

On May 9, a team from the SCMA Alliance will participate in the annual Human Race, which raised more than \$1 million for charity last year. 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.

On May 15 and 16, the Alliance is sponsoring its annual Garden Tour in Sonoma. Participants can take self-guided tours of private gardens, enroll in gardening workshops, and enter a raffle for free dinners at Cyrus Restaurant 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](http://www.scmaa.org) or call Janet Shane at 578-4537.

### **Delivery of current Sonoma Medicine delayed for some subscribers**

Because of problems with the post office, delivery of the Spring issue of Sonoma Medicine was delayed to some subscribers. The magazine was mailed on April 2 and should have been received by mid-April at the latest.

If you still have not received your copy, you can view the online version at [scma.org](http://scma.org). If you prefer, contact the editor, Steve Osborn, at 525-4325 or [sosborn@scma.org](mailto:sosborn@scma.org), and he will send you a copy via unstoppable first-class mail, while supplies last.

### STATE AND NATIONAL NEWS \*\*\*\*\*

#### **California Supreme Court sides with CMA in peer review case**

The California Supreme Court has issued a ruling that prevents peer review "hearing officers" from usurping the clinical decisions of the peer review body. In an amicus brief, CMA urged the court to place limits on the authority of hearing officers.

Hearing officers are usually laypeople without the expertise needed to make decisions on medical disciplinary charges. In the case at hand, a hearing officer's decree to terminate a peer review hearing directly restricted a particular physician's

privileges. The restriction led to the filing of unproven disciplinary reports to state and federal agencies.

By terminating the hearing, the hearing officer essentially made a clinical determination that the physician was medically incompetent to practice at the hospital, thus depriving the physician of a fair hearing before his medical peers.

CMA's brief argued that the granting of such powers to a hearing officer unlawfully deprives physicians of a fair hearing before their medical peers, and deprives patients of access to their physician of choice.

### **Several health-related bills pending before California Legislature**

Several CMA-sponsored bills are being considered by the California Legislature during its session, along with some bills that CMA opposes. Highlights appear below.

**Adequate reimbursement for vaccines** (AB 1201). This CMA-sponsored bill requires health plans to fully reimburse physicians for the costs of immunizations, including purchasing the vaccine, storage, supplies and staff time. The bill also prohibits health plans from applying copays, deductibles and other cost-sharing mechanisms to immunizations.

**Unlawful Health Insurance Cancellation** (AB 2). This CMA-sponsored bill requires insurers to obtain approval from an independent review organization before rescinding a patient's health insurance.

**Car-Pool Lane Access for Physicians** (AB 497). This CMA-sponsored bill would allow physicians to use carpool lanes on the freeway when responding to an emergency. The bill would expand current law, which allows physicians in certain circumstances to exceed speed limits when responding to emergencies.

**Nurse Practitioner Scope of Practice** (SB 294). CMA is opposing this bill, which

would expand the scope of practice for nurse practitioners, allowing them to admit patients to the hospital and be designated as primary care providers.

**Corporate Medicine Bar** (AB 648 and SB 726). These CMA-opposed bills would erode the ban on the corporate practice of medicine in California by allowing certain hospitals to hire physicians. Under current law, hospitals are barred from hiring physicians as employees.

For more on these and other bills, visit CMA's Legislative Hot List at [cmanet.org/news/hotlist.asp](http://cmanet.org/news/hotlist.asp).

#### PEOPLE \*\*\*\*\*

#### **NCMA surgeons in Santa Rosa moving to new office on Fourth Street**

The Santa Rosa surgery division of Northern California Medical Associates plans to move to a new office in early May. The address is 1701 Fourth St., Suite 200. Phone (579-2100) and fax (523-0616) remain the same. The surgeons include Drs. Brian Schmidt, Robert Woodbury, Allen Cortez and Abdul Harris.

#### **Sixteen SCMA physicians receive awards from St. Joseph Health**

The St. Joseph Health System of Sonoma County recently presented "Excellence in Patient Satisfaction" awards to 21 local physicians, including 16 SCMA members. The awards, based on patient surveys, honor physicians who provide outstanding care and communication.

The SCMA honorees included Drs. Lance Barlas, Tom Degenhardt, Patrick Devlin, Sanjay Dhar, Tom Dunlap, Eldan Eichbaum, Joel Erickson, Douglas Green, John Grollmus, Robert Khoo, Susan Logan, Kent Matsuda, Jeannie Pflum, Loie Sauer, Jan Sonander and Gary Stein.

#### **Residency program selects 12 top graduates for incoming class**

From a pool of 400 applicants, the Santa Rosa Family Medicine Residency has selected 12 top medical school graduates for its incoming class of 2012. The new residents—10 women and two men—speak a total of 11 languages, and almost all are fluent in Spanish. They begin the residency, which has trained 288 physicians since 1938, on July 1.

#### RESOURCES \*\*\*\*\*

#### **Urgent Care Medicine conference in San Diego Sept. 23-25**

The American Academy of Urgent Care Medicine is sponsoring a Sept. 23-25 conference in San Diego. Topics include point-of-care chemistry analysis, back pain and otitis media. Up to 13 hours of CME are available. To register, visit [www.aaucm.org](http://www.aaucm.org).

#### **Marsh offers Workers' Compensation programs**

Workers' Compensation insurance rates may be increasing soon. One rating bureau has recommended a 24% increase on July 1, and the Department of Insurance is recommending a 5% increase.

The SCMA-sponsored Workers' Compensation program from Marsh offers members a 5% discount (possibly 15%, depending upon where you have your group medical coverage). The program is underwritten by Employers Compensation Insurance Company.

For more information, contact Marsh at 800-842-3761.

## **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](http://www.unitedwaywinecountry.org/nih).

### **APPLICANTS**

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### **CLASSIFIEDS**

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#### **Free orthopedics seminars in Sonoma**

Queen of the Valley Medical Center is offering FREE one-hour orthopedic seminars at the Sonoma Community Center during May and June. The public is invited.

\* On **May 12**, beginning at 6:15 p.m., Dr. Daniel Birkbeck will present "Treating Hand Problems."

\* On **May 20**, at 6:30 p.m., Dr. Michael Shifflett and Dr. John Diana will present "Treating Arthritis of the Hip and Knee."

\* On **June 3**, at 6:15 p.m., Dr. Stephen Franzino will present "Shoulder Pain: Treatment and Repair."

For more information on the seminars, call 707-251-3509. The Community Center is located at 276 E. Napa St. in Sonoma.

## **Medical Office Space**

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

## **How to submit a classified ad**

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

### **ABOUT SCMA**

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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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