



# SCMA News Briefs

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SONOMA COUNTY MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

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### **Public Health urges physicians to increase pertussis vaccinations**

The California Department of Public Health is urging physicians to increase their Tdap vaccinations because of the current statewide pertussis epidemic. To protect infants who are too young to be vaccinated, anyone with potential infant contact should be immunized. CDPH is making additional Tdap vaccine available at no charge to eligible hospitals, so that they can immunize postpartum women and their close household contacts. For more information, visit [www.cdph.ca.gov](http://www.cdph.ca.gov).

Health care providers are also urged to get Tdap vaccinations to protect themselves and their patients. Effective Sept. 1, the Cal/OSHA Aerosol Transmissible Disease Standard requires all hospitals, outpatient medical facilities and other employers covered by the Standard to offer Tdap immunization to their employees who may be exposed to pertussis. Employees who choose not to be vaccinated will be required to sign a declination form.

Pertussis infection rates in California have increased four-fold this year, compared to the same time period in 2009. If current trends continue, the state could experience a 50-year high in pertussis cases, despite wide availability of the Tdap vaccine. So far this year, five California infants less than three months of age have died of the illness.

Physicians are reminded that pertussis immunity from previous infection or vaccination wanes over time. Even fully immunized children become susceptible to pertussis by adolescence. Additionally, because pertussis vaccine for adolescents and adults was not available until 2005, immunization rates in these populations remain low.

### **SCMA Survey: Local doctors still favor public option and single payer**

Nearly 80% of Sonoma County physicians still favor the public option, and two-thirds still favor a single-payer system. Those were among the key findings of a health reform survey the SCMA sent to more than 1,000 Sonoma County doctors in May, including both members and nonmembers. Almost 200 physicians responded to the survey, which included a range of multiple-choice and open-ended questions about health reform.

Neither the public option nor single payer appeared in the final health reform legislation signed by President Obama in March, but many local physicians continue to support both proposals. Sixty-two percent were strongly in favor of the public option, for example, and 16% were somewhat in favor. In contrast, only 34% were strongly in favor of the final legislation, with 39% somewhat in favor.

When asked about specific aspects of the new legislation, physicians were nearly unanimous (91%) in supporting increased Medicaid pay for primary care physicians, but they had mixed feelings about the new Medicare Independent Payment Advisory Board, which will regulate Medicare spending. Almost half the respondents favored the board, but about one-fourth were opposed, and one-fourth were neutral. Feelings were similarly mixed for reducing Medicare payments for certain diagnostic imaging services.

Complete survey results appear in the Summer issue of Sonoma Medicine, which was mailed to SCMA members in early July. Results can also be read online at [www.scma.org/magazine](http://www.scma.org/magazine).

### **Rep. Thompson honored by North Bay physicians**

Congressman Mike Thompson, whose district includes several North Bay counties, received the 2010 Legacy Award at the annual CMA District 10 caucus in Santa Rosa on June 26. Thompson was honored for his efforts to promote the health and well-being of California residents.

Among many accomplishments in his long career, Thompson wrote landmark legislation while serving in the California State Senate that required health insurance providers to offer all children comprehensive preventive care. Now, as chair of the Blue Dog Coalition's health care task force, Thompson leads efforts in Congress to correct low Medicare reimbursement rates for physicians and to implement a comprehensive telemedicine initiative.

CMA District 10 includes medical societies in Del Norte, Humboldt, Lake, Marin, Mendocino, Napa, Solano and Sonoma counties, representing more than 2,300 physicians in all specialties and modes of practice. At their annual caucus, delegates from the North Bay societies vote on resolutions to be presented at the CMA House of Delegates in the fall.

### **Dr. Gutfreund begins term as SCMA president**

Catherine Gutfreund, MD, a family physician at Kaiser Santa Rosa, began her one-year term as president of SCMA on July 1. A native of the Midwest, she received her MD from the Medical College of Georgia in 1987. Before moving to Sonoma County in 2000, she worked as a primary care physician at the Wiesbaden Air Base in Germany and completed her family medicine residency at the Henry Ford Health System in Detroit. She was in private practice in both Santa Rosa and Sebastopol before joining Kaiser.

In a wide-ranging interview in the current issue of Sonoma Medicine, Gutfreund discusses the new health reform legislation and the need for further changes. She also describes her plans to focus on women's health and young physicians while president of SCMA. The interview can be read online at [www.scma.org/magazine](http://www.scma.org/magazine).

### **Six-month Medicare patch takes effect**

The new Medicare legislation signed by President Obama in June retroactively raises physician payment rates by 2.2%, effective June 1. The new rates apply only through November, however. If Congress fails to intervene, Medicare cuts mandated by the sustainable growth rate (SGR) will take effect on Dec. 1.

Physicians who submitted June claims with charges less than the 2.2% update amount will need to contact their local Medicare contractor to request an adjustment. Charges on claims cannot be altered without a request from the physician or provider. CMS has directed physicians not to resubmit claims already submitted to their Medicare contractor.

The new legislation does not include the California geographic payment (GPCI) fix, which would have provided \$400 million so that 14 currently underpaid counties, including Sonoma, would be reimbursed based on more accurate geographic practice costs. CMA will pursue that provision in other legislation.

### **Twelve new physicians begin residency training in Santa Rosa**

A dozen graduates from the nation's top medical schools entered the Santa Rosa Family Residency in July. Selected from more than 500 applicants, the new residents have already established impressive records in academic achievement and community service. Between them, they speak 11 different languages, and all but one are fluent in Spanish.

"Health care is changing in this country, and the old models of family medicine, where a physician sits in the office and waits for patients to come to them, are outdated," said Dr. Jeff Haney, the residency's program director. "[We] have actively recruited students who want to lead in creating new models of primary care that make patient-centered medical homes a reality across the socioeconomic spectrum."

The new residents are scheduled to graduate in 2013. If past history is any indication, many will stay in Sonoma County, where about half the family physicians currently in practice attended the residency.

### **Physician volunteers needed for Neighbors in Health on Aug. 1**

Doctors from all specialties are encouraged to volunteer for Neighbors in Health, an annual event that provides a day of free health care to uninsured children and teenagers. Volunteers are needed for pediatric and teen clinics, and for immunizations. Slots are available for morning or afternoon shifts.

The event runs from 7:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Sunday, August 1, at the Kaiser Permanente Stein Medical Campus, 3925 Old Redwood Highway, Santa Rosa. To volunteer, visit [www.unitedwaywinecountry.org/nih](http://www.unitedwaywinecountry.org/nih) or call Christine Goodenough at 528-4485, Ext. 121. About two dozen physician volunteers are still needed for the event, which draws hundreds of uninsured children and teenagers from across the county.

### **Doctors need to verify their Medicare PECOS enrollment**

Physicians who have not updated their Medicare enrollment information in the past five years may need to fill out another application or risk facing payment problems for ordered or referred services.

Under new rules that took effect in July, Medicare is authorized to reject claims if an ordering or referring physician is not identified in Medicare's Internet-based PECOS enrollment system. Thousands of otherwise acceptable Medicare claims could go unpaid merely because they were submitted by providers who enrolled in Medicare before the PECOS database was developed.

Don't know if you're in PECOS? CMA has developed a step-by-step guide to walk physicians through the process, from determining if they are already in PECOS to helping them navigate the Internet-based PECOS enrollment system. This guide is available to members at [www.cmanet.org](http://www.cmanet.org). A previously recorded PECOS enrollment webinar is also available for viewing. Nonmember physicians can call CMA at 800-786-4262 for more information.

### **MBC signage requirements now in effect**

California physicians are now required to inform their patients that they are licensed by the Medical Board of California, and to provide patients with the board's contact information.

CMA has prepared a number of resources to help physicians comply with these new regulations, including downloadable posters and customizable patient notices. The materials are available to members at [www.cmanet.org](http://www.cmanet.org). Nonmember physicians can call CMA at 800-786-4262 for more information.

According to the medical board, physicians, not facilities, are responsible for compliance with this regulation. In group settings, only one sign must be posted (should that option be chosen), but it must be posted in a location where it can be seen by all patients.

### **Save the date: North Bay membership dinner on Oct. 28**

Former U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Richard Carmona is the featured speaker at the combined North Bay medical societies' membership dinner on Thursday, Oct. 28. The event, to be held at the San Francisco Yacht Club in Belvedere, begins with a reception at 6 p.m., followed by dinner at 7. Dr. Carmona, a highly respected trauma surgeon and public health expert, served as surgeon general from 2002 to 2006. He will speak about the role of state and local medical societies in disaster preparedness.

### **HOSPITAL/CLINIC UPDATES**

**Sonoma Valley Hospital** has hired a new CEO, Kelly Mather, the chief executive at Sutter Lakeside Hospital in Lakeport for the last eight years. She replaces Carl Gerlach, who has guided Sonoma Valley into the black despite the economic downturn. Earlier this summer, the hospital signed a \$23 million contract for seismic upgrades and a new wing.

**Petaluma Valley Hospital** has cut average door-to-doctor wait times nearly in half this year. During January and February, the average was 35 minutes. That time was reduced to just 18.5 minutes in March and April. The national average is one hour, according to the CDC. "The quicker we can see patients, the quicker we can ease their suffering," said Dr. Randeep Singh, chief of staff at PVH. The hospital recently pledged to begin care within 30 minutes or less of arrival.

The American College of Radiology has designated the **Redwood Regional Medical Group** as a "Breast Imaging Center of Excellence." The designation is the result of peer-review evaluations of all the breast imaging modalities offered by the medical group. RRMG is the first imaging center in Sonoma County to receive the designation.

**Kaiser Santa Rosa** has received a "certificate of occupancy" from the Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development for its new hospital wing, scheduled to open this fall. The 146,000 square foot expansion will double the size of the emergency department and increase the total number of licensed beds in the hospital from 117 to 167. For the numerically inclined, the projected opening date is 10/10/10.

The long approval process for the new **Sutter Medical Center of Santa Rosa** hospital may be nearing an end. The county Planning Commission has approved the environmental report for the hospital, leaving the final decision up to the Board of Supervisors in August. The new hospital, to be located near the Wells Fargo Center for the Arts in Santa Rosa, must begin construction by the fall to meet various state requirements.

## PEOPLE

**Dr. Douglas Abbott**, an orthopaedic surgeon in Santa Rosa, is closing his office and joining an orthopaedic group in Oregon. Dr. Abbott's patients will transition to Santa Rosa Orthopaedics.

**Dr. Brad Drexler**, a Healdsburg obstetrician and gynecologist, is opening a satellite office in Santa Rosa, at Spring Creek Family Practice, 1144 Sonoma Avenue, Suite 119. The phone is 707-545-0717. Dr. Drexler has practiced in Sonoma County for 19 years and offers full ob-gyn services including high-risk obstetrics care, advanced laparoscopic surgery, infertility, tubal reversal, and gyn urology.

**Steve Osborn**, longtime editor of Sonoma Medicine and SCMA News Briefs, is now directly employed by SCMA as its communications director. He previously worked for Redwood Health Services. The move comes as SCMA assumes responsibility for all aspects of its publications, including editorial services, graphic design and advertising. Osborn will continue to edit the magazine and newsletter, in addition to administering the SCMA website and handling public relations. His e-mail is still [sosborn@scma.org](mailto:sosborn@scma.org), but his phone has changed to 707-540-5096. His old phone at RHS is no longer active.

## CLASSIFIEDS

### Reimbursement specialist

Need help with office inefficiencies? Revenue RN provides outsourced billing, coding and revenue cycle services: [www.revenuerecoverynetwork.com](http://www.revenuerecoverynetwork.com).

### Office space

Small suite available for reasonable rent. Reception and three rooms, southeast Santa Rosa. Call Connie, 707-525-0211.

**How to submit a classified ad**

To submit a classified ad for SCMA News Briefs or Sonoma Medicine, contact Erika Goodwin at [solanomedsoc@sbcglobal.net](mailto:solanomedsoc@sbcglobal.net) or 707-548-6491. 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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