

Single-Payor Proposal Faces Uncertain Future

Although legislation aimed at establishing a single-payor healthcare system in Maine drew significant media coverage in the waning days of the legislative session, the final language incorporated into the state's overall budget bill reduced the original proposed bill to a study rather than immediate implementation of a single payor-system.

The measure approved by the Legislature calls for a 19-member panel to conduct a feasibility study and then develop and submit— by March 2002— legislation to implement a single-payor system.

Given the complexity of this issue— and the strong opposition that exists in many quarters to a government-run healthcare system— it remains doubtful that the panel can make much progress toward this goal in such a short period of time.

The price tag associated with a single-payor system is expected to be a major issue during the panel's process and the deliberations of the Legislature next spring. It is estimated that the cost of running a single-payor system would require substantial tax increases and would exceed the state's entire budget.

The panel, which will be called the Health Care System and Health Security Board, will include a broad array of interests, including hospitals, physicians,

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Session Closes With Key Medicaid Expansion

The legislative session ended late last month with the passage of a hospital-supported measure that will dedicate six cents of the new 26 cent per pack cigarette tax toward a further expansion of Medicaid coverage for low-income Mainers.

For the second year in a row the Legislature has expanded the number of people who are eligible for Medicaid coverage. The most important part of the bill, passed in the final hours of this session, will allow an estimated 14,000 single adults and couples without minor children to enroll in Medicaid if their annual incomes fall below \$8,600 (individual) or \$11,600 (couple).

MHA strongly supported last year's Medicaid expansion, which has enabled 10,000 uninsured adults to receive health insurance coverage. Prior to this legislative session the Association began meeting with low-income advocates and legislative leaders to build support for the expansion finally approved last week. MHA also met with Governor **Angus King** and worked closely with the bill's chief sponsor, House Speaker **Mike Saxl** (D-Portland) to ensure that the final compromise language specifically helped low-income adults who were not covered in the Medicaid expansion approved last year. Legislators supporting the expansion argued that increased coverage will result in reduced uncompensated care costs and cost shifting which leads to higher charges and insurance premiums. MHA consistently emphasized that expanded coverage will increase access to primary care services, which will over time improve health status and reduce the number of uninsured patients who turn to hospital emergency departments as their point of entry to healthcare. The expansion of the Medicaid program will require a waiver from the federal government. This means that the latest expansion probably will not become effective until late 2002, at the earliest. Funding from the new cigarette tax also will not be available until after the tax goes into effect in the fall of 2002.

The new law also makes a number of specific changes to the Medicaid program:

- ◆ Beginning next year the state's Medicaid program will be called MaineCare;
- ◆ One-time increased funding will be made available for rural health centers which provide care for low-income residents;
- ◆ Asset limits which have prevented some low-income

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Medicaid Expansion, continued

people from being eligible for coverage have been increased to \$12,000 (families) and \$8,000 (individuals); ownership of more than one automobile will no longer prevent a family from qualifying for coverage;

- ◆ Children will remain covered for a one year period even if a family's income increases and family income levels will be rechecked less frequently by DHS.

- ◆ The Affordable Health Care Fund will be established to assist individuals with the costs of participating in community health access programs such as one under development at Mt. Desert Island Hospital in Bar Harbor.

The original Medicaid bill introduced this session would have expanded coverage for children and the disabled and directed DHS to seek a waiver for a Medicaid Buy-in program for self-employed individuals and sole proprietors with incomes below 300% of the federal poverty level. Those provisions were ultimately deleted from final bill because the Governor and other legislators would not support the needed tax increases to fully fund the legislation.

MHA Contact: Mary Mayhew

Single Payor, continued

nurses, employers, insurers, economists and others.

The Legislature's support of this bill was more reflective of current frustration over rising health insurance costs than widespread support for a government-run healthcare system. In approving the initial bill, legislators spent little time discussing the potential problems associated with developing and implementing such a system. MHA will be working closely with legislative leadership and the King Administration as the panel membership is named this summer and begins meeting later this year.

MHA Contact: Mary Mayhew

Bullock Begins Term as New MHA Chair

Scott Bullock, CEO of MaineGeneral Medical Center in Augusta and Waterville, began his term as Chair of the Maine Hospital Association's Board of Directors on July 1. He was installed as Chair during a ceremony late last month at MHA's Annual Summer Forum in Rockport.

Bullock succeeds **Judith Tarr**, CEO of Miles Memorial Hospital in Damariscotta, who has served as MHA Chair since October 1999. Tarr will continue to serve on the MHA Board of Directors as Immediate Past Chair.

Other members joining the 2001 MHA Board for the first time or assuming new responsibilities include:

Officer

Ralph Gabarro, MHA Board Secretary, CEO, Mayo Regional Hospital

At-Large Members

Philo Hall, CEO, Downeast Community Hospital

Norman Ledwin, CEO, Eastern Maine Medical Center

Sister Mary Norberta, CEO, St. Joseph Hospital

Joyce Packard, Trustee, Sebasticook Valley Hospital

Ronald Pelton, Trustee, Parkview Hospital

AHA Delegate

Vincent Conti, CEO, Maine Medical Center

Ex-officio Members

Chair, Health Policy Council: **Peter Chalke**, CEO, Central Maine Medical Center

Chair, Legislative Council: **Doug Jones**, CEO, Maine Coast Memorial Hospital

Chair, Professional Practices Council: **Margaret Pinkham**, CEO, St. Andrews Hospital

Chair, Healthcare Governance Council: **Edgar Catlin**, Mid Coast Hospital

Chair, Continuing Care Council: **Roy Hitchings**, CEO, Penobscot Bay Medical Center

During the installation ceremony, Bullock said the Association's highest priorities for the next twelve months will include:

- ◆ Developing new and innovative ways of dealing with the workforce shortage and the growing problems in the work environment— all in the context of much greater union activity.

- ◆ Stepping up efforts to educate the public and the business community on the true drivers of healthcare costs. Improve our data and communication efforts in this area and assess and address the crushing administrative costs in the system.

- ◆ Continuing MHA's multi-faceted and very successful Medicare Reimbursement Initiative and applying the same strategies to Medicaid.

- ◆ Developing and implementing strategies that will break the cycle of continued attacks on tax exempt status by towns and cities.

- ◆ Proactively addressing the issue of medical errors and the problematic public policy initiatives currently on the table.

- ◆ Clearly and forcefully describing the vital role hospitals play in our communities through stepped up communication efforts.

- ◆ Proactively offering solutions to the problem of access to affordable health insurance coverage.

- ◆ Helping to shape the future of healthcare in Maine at a time when it appears that so much about the current system is failing.

MHA Contact: Steven Michaud

Allied Professionals Honored For Exceptional Service

For the past 11 years, Maine's statewide allied societies use MHA's Summer Forum as an opportunity to honor professional achievement among healthcare professionals.

The 11th Annual Allied Recognition Luncheon, sponsored by ProMutual, was held in late June at the Samoset Resort. Below is a list of this year's winners, their award and the sponsor of the recognition:

Alma Fournier, RN

Ambulatory Outpatient Care Director, Redington-Fairview General Hospital
OMNE Leadership Achievement Award
OMNE, Nursing Leaders of Maine

Jan Murton, LSW

Program Coordinator, Care Partners
MaineGeneral Medical Center
2000 Medical Social Worker of the Year Award
Society for Social Work Leaders in Health Care

Ellen Moscinski, LCSW

Director of Social Work, Maine Medical Center
2000 Social Work Leader of the Year Award
Society for Social Work Leaders in Health Care

Gwen Rogers, RN, MSB, CIC

Infection Control Practitioner, Maine Medical Center
Outstanding Service Award
Association for Professionals in Infection Control & Epidemiology,
Pine Tree Chapter

Sheri Dirrigl, RN, CIC

Infection Control Practitioner, Maine Medical Center
Outstanding Service Award
Association for Professionals in Infection Control & Epidemiology,
Pine Tree Chapter

Tom Shandera, RN, MPH, CIC

Infection Control Practitioner, Acadia Hospital
Outstanding Service Award
Association for Professionals in Infection Control & Epidemiology,
Pine Tree Chapter

Connie Bright

Volunteer Team Manager, Miles Healthcare
D.O.V.E. Award
ME Society Directors of Healthcare Volunteer Services

Cora Damon

Health Science Librarian, MaineGeneral Medical Center
Eleanor C. Cairns Distinguished Librarian Award
Health Science Libraries & Information Consortium

Georges Nashan, RN, MS

PI Analyst, St. Joseph Hospital
MAHQ Distinguished Member Award
Maine Association of Healthcare Quality

Dan Marois

Community Relations Coordinator, St. Mary's Regional Medical Center
Lauren Schulman Award
Maine Healthcare Communications Association

MHA Contact: Jim Hamar

Maine's Longest Serving Executive Assistant Honored

Doris Bunker Rzasa, Executive Assistant to the President of Maine Coast Memorial Hospital in Ellsworth was honored recently by MHA as Maine's longest-serving CEO Assistant, with 43 years of service in that position.

When Rzasa began at Maine Coast in 1958, the hospital was brand new. Throughout her career she's also covered many different areas for periods of time. From medical staff secretary, auxiliary secretary and the personnel department to public relations director and fundraiser—Rzasa has seen it all. During her tenure at the hospital, Rzasa has worked directly for 16 CEOs and more than 24 board chairs.

One of her co-workers recently told MHA, "Doris loves her hospital with all her heart. In fact, the pulse of Maine Coast Memorial Hospital comes from the heart of this fine lady and the soul of the hospital also comes from Doris Bunker Rzasa."

MHA Contact: Jim Hamar

Maine Hospitals Sign Pollution Prevention Pledge

Nearly all of Maine's hospitals have now taken a voluntary pledge to build a cleaner, safer environment by agreeing to eliminate most mercury-containing supplies and medical equipment and to reduce the use of PVC plastics.

The 36 hospitals (of MHA's 38 member hospitals) that have signed the agreement are now receiving free technical assistance from CGH Environmental Strategies, a nationally-known environmental consulting firm from Vermont that has been retained with grants provided by the Maine Department of Environmental Protection and an international organization known as Health Care Without Harm. By signing the pollution prevention agreement, Maine hospitals are continuing to position themselves as leaders in environmental initiatives.

MHA Contact: Jim Hamar

Healthcare Providers Join to Promote Successful Aging

Several Maine healthcare providers recently announced a partnership that will offer older adults and their families access to a comprehensive resource for health promotion, wellness, social services, caregiver support and service integration.

Under the direction of **Peggy Haynes**, the Partnership for Healthy Aging is working in collaboration with organizations and resources for older adults throughout the community to provide a continuum of care and services to promote successful aging. The new partnership has been established by: MaineHealth, Maine Medical Center, Mercy Hospital, Community Health Services, VNA Home Health Care, and Southern Maine Agency on Aging. For more information, contact Haynes at (207) 775-1095. **MHA Contact: Kevin Lewis**

King Signs Mandatory Overtime Bill Into Law

Last month, Governor Angus King signed into law a mandatory overtime bill that ensures continued protection of patient safety while allowing breaks for nurses who work long periods of mandatory overtime.

The Governor's enactment of the bill, now Public Law 401, follows several weeks of negotiations between MHA, the Governor's office and the Maine State Nurses Association. The bill is decidedly better than the original MSNA bill, which would have barred hospitals from requiring mandatory overtime— a move that could compromise patient care in rare instances when no other staff is available and patient safety is in jeopardy.

The law now allows a nurse who completes a 12-hour shift and is mandated to work overtime, to request and receive a 10-hour rest break upon completion of the overtime. The law also applies only to nurses; the original MSNA bill applied to all healthcare employees providing direct care. An exception to this new law is provided in the case of "an unforeseen emergent circumstance when mandatory overtime is necessary as a last resort to ensure patient safety." Inclusion of this clause was MHA's top priority.

MHA Contact: Mary Mayhew

Nursing Home Celebrates First Year of Eden Alternative

Maine's largest nursing home is among the first in the state to implement the Eden Alternative, an approach designed to improve residents' quality of life through environmental changes and the establishment of community within the nursing home.

The St. Marguerite d'Youville Pavilion, which is affiliated with St. Mary's Medical Center in Lewiston, recently completed its first full year as an "Edenized" nursing home, a process designed to improve the daily living environment in part through the introduction of plants, flowers, pets and home-like activities such as bread baking. The residents take responsibility for these changes to their community, which in turn enhance cognitive functioning and memory skills, promote interaction among residents and stimulate the senses. Staff at the d'Youville Pavilion believe this effort may revolutionize the nursing home setting in Maine.

As a further step in integrating the Eden Alternative, d'Youville plans to eliminate all of the facility's artificial plants and replace them with live plants that residents can care for. D'Youville is also engaged in bringing the surrounding community into the nursing home— such as activities with local school children. For more information on d'Youville Pavilion or the Eden Alternative, contact **Dayna Larson** at 777-4250. **MHA Contact: Kevin Lewis**