

## **Maine hospital leaders seek Medicare relief**

**Hospital leaders from across Maine told the state's Congressional delegation in April that Medicare reimbursement shortfalls are exacerbating the crisis in insurance affordability.**

The 20 hospital leaders also took their message to the White House, where they met with **Mark B. McClellan**, President **George W. Bush's** chief health policy adviser. Joined by representatives from Tennessee and Massachusetts, the group made clear the problems associated with the president's proposal to make up for Medicare cuts to physicians by taking money from hospitals.

The hospital executives and trustees were in Washington, DC, for the American Hospital Association's Annual Meeting April 6-9.

MHA Chairman of the Board **Scott Bullock** stressed to each of the four members of Maine's delegation that the health insurance affordability crisis in Maine is worsened by continually eroding Medicare reimbursement and by the fact that the state's hospitals rank 46<sup>th</sup> in the nation in terms of Medicare payments as a percentage of costs. Maine hospitals are paid just 88 cents for each dollar of care provided to Medicare patients, while the nation as a whole is seeing hospitals reimbursed at 100 percent of their costs.

Bullock and the other hospital leaders urged the delegation to support a bill (H.R. 1609/S. 885) that would equalize payment rates among all hospitals, eliminating the reimbursement differences between large urban hospitals and all other hospitals. The equalization provision of the bill would help all hospitals in Maine. The bill would also increase Medicare area wage index adjustments that

**MAY 2002**

**(Continued on next page)**

## **Hospitals' retention efforts demonstrate success**

**At a time when hospitals are faced with a growing workforce shortage, many believe that retaining qualified staff is the first order of business in addressing the problem.**

For example, Mayo Regional Hospital formed a Recruitment and Retention Committee that hospital officials credit with reducing their turnover rate by 35% from 2000 to 2001.

Mayo made changes to scheduling policies that guarantee hours for nursing personnel and instituted several new initiatives, including an annual wage analysis to ensure competitiveness in the labor market; a new longevity bonus to reward long-term employees for their dedication; a goal-sharing program that rewards employees for achieving quality and efficiency targets and an employee opinion survey, which uses employee feedback to develop continuous improvement plans.

The Acadia Hospital's retention committee, renamed the Shared Nursing Leadership Committee, has identified five key areas for further development. With strong staff nurse leadership, this committee has established action plans and goals as they affect recruitment and retention in the following areas: human resource strategies, including compensation, data and job satisfaction; affiliations with schools of nursing including outreach to new graduates; career development and promotion of nursing as a profession; and respect and recognition.

Such retention committees have been shown to work in a variety of settings. Hospitals have found that good retention and recruitment programs are based on evaluations of the work environment including staff interviews, regular formal meetings with staff members and the

**(Continued on next page)**

**(Medicare relief, continued from page 1)**

often penalize hospitals in rural areas and make it difficult for them to pay wages that attract and retain workers. Were this bill to pass, Maine hospitals would see an additional \$42 million over 5 years.

The hospital leaders also urged passage of a bill (H.R. 1556/S. 839) that would provide full Medicare inflation updates for inpatient and outpatient services—updates that are critical to helping hospitals keep pace with rising wage and benefit costs. It would also ensure that teaching hospitals have the resources they need to educate future generations of caregivers and to care for patients that often are uninsured. The financial impact in Maine would be more than \$30 million over five years.

The group emphasized that in light of hospitals' rising costs, Medicare reimbursements must increase in order to preserve the public/private partnership that has defined healthcare in Maine.

Senators **Susan Collins** (R) and **Olympia Snowe** (R), as well as Rep. **John Baldacci** (D), have agreed to co-sponsor both bills. Rep. **Tom Allen** (D) has agreed to co-sponsor H.R. 1609, the bill that would equalize rates.

**MHA Contact: Steven Michaud**

**(Retention efforts, continued from page 1)**

recommendations of committees comprised of managers and direct care staff responsible for reviewing and evaluating the practice environment. A retention committee can help facilitate efforts to identify and address various workforce-related issues that affect both retention and recruitment.

At Blue Hill Memorial Hospital, staff mentors do exit interviews with departing employees. Staffers may feel more comfortable discussing reasons for leaving with a peer rather than with an administrator, hospital officials said. As a result, the hospital will learn more about how to retain staff. In addition, the hospital has added a mentoring program for new employees and has broadened orientation to include a fair, computer testing or a breakfast with the hospital CEO.

MHA's Workforce Initiative recognizes the impact well-targeted retention programs have on building a stable and satisfied workforce. The first annual Leadership Institute held in early 2002 provided frontline and midlevel managers with information to support them in their roles including strategies for retaining, recruiting, orienting and supporting staff.

**MHA Contact: Kathleen Stuchiner**

## **Caregiver of the Year Award planned**

**The Maine Hospital Association is accepting nominations for the first Caregiver of the Year award, to be presented at this year's Summer Forum.**

In what is expected to be an annual event, the award will be given to a caregiver, from a member institution, who demonstrates extraordinary commitment to the delivery of care to patients and their families.

Award nominees should:

- Exemplify extraordinary commitment to patients on a daily basis;
- Show compassion, empathy and respect in the delivery of care to patients and their families;
- Acknowledge and meet the unique physical, emotional and practical needs of patients and their families; and
- Promote an environment of cooperation and collaboration in which the expertise and experience of all healthcare professionals are available to patients.

Each member hospital may submit one nomination by completing a nomination form, including a brief description of how the nominee meets the criteria for the award and three specific examples of how the nominee has gone "above and beyond the call of duty" in demonstrating commitment to patient care. Nominations are due by Monday, May 6 and should be submitted by the hospital CEO's office.

Nominations will be reviewed by the MHA Caregiver Award Committee, chaired by **Judy Tarr**, immediate past chair of the MHA Board of Directors. The committee is composed of six former MHA board chairs. The committee will select a recipient by Monday, May 20, and notification will be made by Friday, May 24.

The award will be presented on Wednesday evening, June 26, during the opening banquet of the Summer Forum at the Samoset Resort in Rockport. Recognition will be provided at the event and through the distribution of a statewide press release.

**MHA Contact: Carol Sinclair**

## **Stop Stroke kick-off set for May 30**

**Senator Susan Collins and possibly other members of Maine's Congressional Delegation will participate in a press conference in Portland on May 30 to launch a year-long effort to educate the public about stroke. A Bangor press event is also planned.**

Senator Collins is a co-sponsor of national legislation (Stroke Treatment and Ongoing Prevention – the so-called STOP Stroke Act) that would establish a national public education program about stroke risk factors, signs, symptoms and treatment of stroke.

The Maine Hospital Association has joined with the American Stroke Association and the New England Rehabilitation Hospital of Portland in sponsoring a year-long awareness campaign aimed at getting more Mainers to understand the signs of stroke and recognizing it as a medical emergency.

All MHA member hospitals are invited to participate in this education effort. Many members have already attended planning meetings. **MHA Contact: Mark Ishkanian**

## **Maine hospital employees exchange mercury thermometers**

### **In a celebration of Earth Week, 37 Maine hospitals conducted a thermometer exchange for their employees.**

Hospitals reported almost 4,000 thermometers had been collected from more than 2,800 employees. Hospital employees who turned in mercury fever thermometers from home received a mercury-free digital thermometer in exchange, while supplies lasted. State employees were invited to turn in their mercury thermometers at a number of state offices.

The mercury collected by hospitals and the state will be properly recycled. Collecting mercury thermometers for recycling keeps highly toxic mercury from being released into homes when broken or into the environment when disposed of in the trash.

At a press conference, **Steven Michaud**, president of the Maine Hospital Association, emphasized that the exchange is just one part of hospitals' efforts to protect Maine from mercury pollution.

"Our hospitals are deeply committed to building healthier communities and we hope our actions will serve as a positive example of what can be accomplished by working together to improve the environment upon which we all depend," Michaud said.

Gov. **Angus King** praised Maine hospitals.

"I want to recognize the Maine Hospital Association and their members for setting an example by sponsoring mercury thermometer exchanges in their hospitals and taking other steps to get mercury out of their waste stream," King said. "You've shown real leadership on this issue."

The hospital thermometer exchange was organized by Maine Hospitals for a Healthy Environment, a pollution prevention partnership between Maine Hospital Association, Natural Resources Council of Maine and Maine Department of Environmental Protection, with support from Health Care Without Harm. For more on the partnership, visit [http://www.themha.org/pages/resource\\_pages/res2b.htm](http://www.themha.org/pages/resource_pages/res2b.htm).

"We appreciate the leadership of the Maine Hospital Association and Maine hospitals in undertaking this thermometer collection effort," said **Brownie Carson**, executive director of the Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM). "You are leading the way in removing mercury as a threat to Maine's environment."

Contributions to MHA enabled the purchase of the mercury-free digital thermometers. Casella Waste Systems is the major sponsor of the hospital thermometer exchange. Additional donors include Dead River Company, Waste Management Inc., ENVIRON Services Inc., VHA New England, Synernet, Clean Harbors Environmental Services Inc., Stericycle Inc. and Crow International Inc. Regional Waste Systems donated 250 digital thermometers for the exchange.

Mercury is toxic to the nervous system, especially affecting the sensitive growing brains of babies. The Maine Bureau of Health has issued health warnings about eating most freshwater fish and some seafood because of mercury contamination.

**MHA Contact: Tammy Butts**

## **Maine Hospital Association honored for environmental efforts**

### **The Maine Hospital Association has been honored for its efforts to make the state's hospitals more environmentally friendly.**

Hospitals for a Healthy Environment (H2E), a joint program of the American Hospital Association, American Nurses Association, Health Care Without Harm and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, awarded MHA a Champion for Change Award at the American Hospital Association annual meeting Monday, April 8.

MHA was one of 11 health-related organizations given the Champions for Change Award in recognition of its work to promote pollution prevention in healthcare facilities and to bring new hospitals into the H2E program.

In late 2000, the Maine Hospital Association (MHA), the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM), also representing an international organization called Health Care Without Harm, formed a coalition called "Maine Hospitals For A Healthy Environment." These organizations signed the Pollution Prevention Agreement, where Maine's hospital community voluntarily pledged to take a number of important steps over the next several years to improve the environment. **MHA Contact: Tammy Butts**

## **Work progresses on MHA's new building, scheduled to open in August**

### **The walls and roof trusses are up on MHA's new building.**

The 10,000 square-foot building on Fuller Road in Augusta is expected to be completed in mid-August.

The additional space over the approximately 5,500 square feet MHA currently occupies will include meeting rooms that will allow the association to bring on site many of the educational sessions now held in other locations.

It also will allow employees of the Maine Recruitment Center, which currently has its offices on Crosby Street about two miles from MHA, to occupy the same building as the rest of the Association staff.

**MHA Contact: Tammy Butts**

## Education series to focus on patient safety

**Another phase of the Maine Hospital Association's patient safety initiative will get underway in May. MHA will host the first of three sessions that will provide practical information on improving patient safety and reducing medical errors.**

National and local speakers will share their knowledge and information about optimal safety practices and models. Faculty also will illustrate how to identify causes of error and influence change in systems to prevent them. Participants will have ample time to exchange information and discuss specific work underway in support of patient safety improvements in their respective facilities.

Attendees will hear from health policy experts, researchers, regulatory and accreditation officials as well as practitioners and those responsible for improving quality and patient safety and reducing the risk of errors in their facilities.

In this phase of our initiative, we seek to involve key constituents within hospitals and their affiliated organizations, including clinicians and managers at all levels. Our goal is to increase understanding of the broader policy issues regarding patient safety and support focused efforts to reduce patient injury by identifying and correcting the causes of medical errors.

The first session will be Thursday, May 30, at the Harraseeket Inn in Freeport. Other sessions will be in September and January.

A program brochure is available on the Internet at [http://www.themha.org/pages/new\\_pages/new2.htm](http://www.themha.org/pages/new_pages/new2.htm)  
**MHA Contact: Carol Sinclair or Kathleen Stuchiner**

## People

**Peter E. Chalke**, president and chief executive officer of Central Maine Medical Center, has been named president and chief executive officer of Central Maine Healthcare, the parent organization to 17 companies. A member of the CMMC management team for nearly 20 years, Chalke joined the medical center in 1983 as vice president for ancillary services. In 1986, he was promoted to senior vice president, and two years later, he was named CMMC's executive vice president and chief operating officer, responsible for the Medical Center's day-to-day operations. . . **Barbara Steller**, RNC, BS, MLA, of Dexter, is Sebasticook Valley Hospital's capital campaign chairperson for the Outpatient and Women's Health Center. Construction for the \$1.9 million project began in October and is scheduled to be completed this summer. Steller, a member of the SVH Board of Trustees, has been an active member of the SVH's Women's Health Advisory Committee. . . **Kevin Sedgwick**, formerly of Quorum Health Resources, became the new chief financial officer of The Maine Health Alliance on April 22. . .

**Catherine Weeks** has been appointed director of medical information services and privacy officer at Franklin Memorial Hospital. Before coming to Franklin Memorial Hospital, Weeks served as the coding director at Parkview Hospital in Brunswick. . . **Anne Dinsmore** has been named director of government and employer relations at MaineHealth. She had been executive director of the Maine Heart Center. Dinsmore will be responsible for increasing the involvement of MaineHealth and its members with local and state officials and employers to improve community health and access to healthcare. . . **Diane Atwood**, former television reporter on WCSH, Channel 6, in Portland, is Mercy Hospital's new manager of marketing and public relations.

Visit MHA's new Maine Center for Healthcare Governance for timely information and resources designed to help you become a more informed and effective board member. You can access the Center by visiting MHA's website at [www.themha.org/pages/governance.htm](http://www.themha.org/pages/governance.htm)