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Skyline news

REPORTING ON NEW YORK'S HEALTH CARE NEWS

Governor Pataki Opens 2003 State Legislative Session

On January 8, 2003, Governor Pataki opened the 2003 State Legislative Session with his annual State of the State address to a Joint Session of the New York State Assembly and the State Senate. While the speech focused primarily on calls for unity and bipartisanship in order to deal with the economic fallout from the national recession and the September 11 attacks, the Governor did make several references to health care spending issues that are of concern to GNYHA members.

The Governor called upon the State Legis-

lature to work with him to strengthen and renew the Health Care Reform Act (HCRA) and to continue reform efforts to lower the costs of Medicaid and other government programs. He also warned that, with the exception of public security, no sector of the budget would be exempt from reductions in spending. Details of any proposals will be included in the Governor's Executive Budget proposal, which will be released in the next several weeks. In the meantime, GNYHA will monitor these issues closely and will vigor-

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Teaching Hospitals Launch New Ad Urging Congress to End IME Cuts

GNYHA, the American Hospital Association (AHA), the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), and other hospital associations and teaching hospitals across the country have launched a new print advertisement urging Congress to stop the Federal cutbacks to teaching hospitals. On October 1, 2002, the Medicare indirect medical education (IME) cuts to teaching hospitals began to take place. Unless these cuts are stopped, teaching hospi-

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City and State Agencies Prepare for Vaccination of Health Care Workers

The NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) has requested NYC hospital CEOs to inform DOHMH of their plans regarding participation in the Federal pre-event smallpox vaccination program by January 13, 2003. The program, which was announced by President Bush on December 13, 2002, calls for the vaccination of approximately 450,000 health care and public health workers across the country for the purpose of developing smallpox response teams, which will consist of 100–200 workers in each hospital. The teams are intended to ensure the availability of health care workers in every hospital to care for the first one to five smallpox patients



Foreground, left to right: Wayne M. Osten, Director, NYS DOH Office of Health Systems Management; Guthrie S. Birkhead, M.D., M.P.H., Director, NYS DOH Center for Community Health; and Thomas R. Frieden, M.D., M.P.H., Commissioner, NYC DOHMH discuss smallpox preparedness plans and the role of hospitals in preparing for and managing suspect smallpox cases with GNYHA's Executive Committee on January 9.

who might present to the hospital as well as to provide vaccination to the public should mass vaccination be needed in the future.

In order to implement the plan in NYC, DOHMH has requested that hospitals notify it by January 13, 2003, as to whether they will participate in the program. For those hospitals planning to participate, DOHMH also asks hospitals to provide, by January 17, 2003, information concerning the planned composition of their teams by category and what resources the hospital is able to provide in connection with the implementation of the program. To facilitate implementation, DOHMH has also distributed template letters that hospitals can use to introduce the program to hospital staff, as well as an information sheet regarding smallpox, the vaccine

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and its contraindications, and the vaccination plan. "Train the trainer" sessions will be provided by DOHMH in late January.

Separately, the NYS Department of Health (DOH) is sending letters to CEOs outside NYC outlining implementation of the plan, information to be supplied to local health departments, and the expected timelines.

To facilitate member decision-making about participation, DOHMH Commissioner

Thomas Frieden, M.D., M.P.H.; DOH Director of the Office of Health Systems Management Wayne Osten; and DOH Director of the Center for Community Health Guthrie Birkhead, M.D. attended GNYHA's Executive Committee meeting on January 9. As a result of the discussion at the meeting, GNYHA's Executive Committee adopted a resolution (see box) strongly encouraging all hospitals to participate in the program. Also on January 9,

GNYHA held a meeting conducted by representatives of DOHMH and DOH to respond to members' questions about participation.

Vaccination Liability Protection: The Homeland Security Act, which becomes effective January 24, 2003, contains a provision that provides liability protection to smallpox vaccine manufacturers and distributors; health care entities under whose auspices the vaccination program is offered; the practitioners providing the vaccine; and the agents, employees, and officers of the manufacturers, health care entities, and the vaccinating practitioners. The provision applies to injuries arising from the primary vaccination as well as from the secondary transmission of the vaccine. Claims are to be filed with the Federal government pursuant to the Federal Torts Claims Act, which requires that the claimant show that negligence caused the injury. With respect to injuries to workers covered by a facility's Worker's Compensation policy, DOH has indicated that the State Worker's Compensation Board has stated preliminarily that such claims would "likely" be covered, subject to Worker's Compensation program requirements and limitations. ■

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, the Executive Committee of the GNYHA Board of Governors strongly believes that hospital participation in Phase I of the Federal pre-event smallpox vaccination program, which calls for the development of a vaccinated Smallpox Response Team in each hospital, is important to a hospital's ability to serve and protect its patients and its community; and

WHEREAS, the Executive Committee strongly believes that hospital participation in Phase I is important to a hospital's ability to protect its workers who may be called upon to care for suspect or actual smallpox cases; and

WHEREAS, the Executive Committee strongly believes that hospital participation in Phase I is important to the country's public health defense and emergency response systems;

NOW, THEREFORE, it is

RESOLVED that, the Executive Committee of the GNYHA Board of Governors expects that each hospital will participate in Phase I of the Federal pre-event smallpox vaccination program. The Executive Committee requests GNYHA staff to work with local, state, and Federal authorities to attempt to address specific concerns identified by hospitals with respect to implementation of the plan. The Executive Committee applauds those hospitals that have already agreed to create such teams and gives special recognition to health care workers who volunteer to participate on the teams. ■

GNYHA Testifies on Implementation of Family Health Plus

On January 10, GNYHA testified at a hearing of the NYS Assembly Health Committee and the NYC Council Committees on Health, General Welfare, and Oversight and Investigations. The hearing addressed whether enrollees in Disaster Relief Medicaid (DRM), the time-limited program established after September 11, made a successful transition into permanent Medicaid or Family Health Plus (FHP) after DRM expired last year, the status of FHP implementation, and the extent to which applicants may be encountering enrollment barriers.

GNYHA's testimony focused on the results of research it conducted for a Commonwealth Fund-sponsored study that examined how 13 other states with health insurance programs similar to Family Health Plus have addressed their design and implementation challenges in order to glean lessons for implementing FHP and coordinating it with New York's existing Medicaid and Child Health

Plus (CHP) programs. The experience of DRM and its streamlined application and enrollment process, as well as the examples of other states, provide valuable lessons for how New York could ensure that its public health

insurance programs attain their highest potential. Finally, GNYHA recommended strategies to maximize enrollment and retention and reduce administrative costs in FHP, Medicaid, and CHP. ■

GNYHA Members Meet with NYC Council Leadership

On January 6, GNYHA staff and several CEOs from GNYHA member hospitals met with NYC Council Speaker Gifford Miller and Council Member Christine Quinn, Chair of the City Council's Health Committee, and several other Health Committee members, to discuss the pressing issues facing hospitals in NYC, and to begin to develop an agenda of common goals that the Council and GNYHA members can actively address together. The meeting included a briefing on the financial health of the hospital industry; the challenges hospitals

face in preparing for nuclear, biological, and chemical attacks; GNYHA's role in coordinating emergency preparedness efforts with its members and City, State, and Federal officials; joint advocacy efforts that can be undertaken in Albany to protect Medicaid funding; and Speaker Gifford's and Council Member Quinn's interest in supporting the efforts of GNYHA's members to attract and retain health care workers.

GNYHA appreciates the time Speaker Miller, Council Member Quinn, and the members of the Health Committee took for the meeting, and looks forward to continuing to work together. ■

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ously oppose any efforts to reduce Medicaid benefits or provider payments. County officials from around the State, including the City of New York, have called upon the State to take over the local share of Medicaid or to take actions to reduce the cost of the program to county governments.

In addition to these health care spending

issues, the Governor announced plans to build on the State's high-tech and biotechnology economic development efforts by expanding New York's Centers for Excellence initiative. This effort, designed to encourage the development of high-tech industries and now moving forward in several upstate communities and on Long Island, will be expanded to include Westchester County and New York

City. Several academic medical centers that are members of GNYHA will be part of this expanded effort.

Governor Pataki also announced the creation of a new State Office of Disaster Preparedness and Response, to enhance the State's preparedness efforts for possible future terrorist attacks or natural disasters. The new office will coordinate the efforts of State agencies, local governments, and the private sector. Jim Natoli, currently Director of State Operations, will direct the new office. ■

Upcoming GNYHA Briefings

ECFMG Exchange Visitor Sponsorship Program

Date: Thursday, January 16, 2003

Time: 9:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m.

Location: GNYHA Conference Center, 555 West 57th Street, 15th Floor

At this briefing, the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG) will discuss the Exchange Visitor Sponsorship Program, by which graduates of international medical schools get a J-1 visa and may train or perform research in the U.S. Eleanor Fitzpatrick, Manager of the Exchange Visitor Program, and Wendy Marien and Anna Iacone, New York Regional Advisors, will review the process for participation and will provide an update on several recent program changes. For information contact Tim Johnson, and to register contact Jennefer Vicioso, at GNYHA.

HIPAA Privacy Rule and Home Care

Date: Tuesday, January 21, 2003

Time: 2:00 p.m.– 4:30 p.m.

Location: GNYHA Conference Center, 555 West 57th Street, 15th Floor

This briefing will address the impact of the HIPAA Privacy Rule on home care providers. The meeting will feature presentations by the Visiting Nurse Service of New York and Kathleen Carver Cheney, from the law firm of Duane Morris, on the application of the HIPAA regulations to home care. In addition, there will be a panel discussion with representatives from the Metropolitan Jewish Health System, North Shore-Long Island Jewish Home Care Network, Visiting Nurse Service of New York, and Duane Morris. For more information contact Susan Stuard, and to register contact Barbara Marino, at GNYHA.

Recent Syphilis Outbreak in NYC

Date: Wednesday, January 22, 2003

Time: 10:00 a.m.–11:30 a.m.

Location: GNYHA Conference Center, 555 West 57th Street, 15th Floor

This briefing will address the recent outbreak of syphilis cases in NYC. Representatives from the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene will give a presentation. For more information contact Doris R. Varlese, and to register contact Barbara Marino, at GNYHA.

Scabies Prevention and Treatment: A Regionwide Symposium for the Health Care Provider Community

Date: Wednesday, January 22, 2003

Time: 1:00 p.m.–4:00 p.m.

Location: GNYHA Conference Center, 555 West 57th Street, 15th Floor

GNYHA, with the NYS Department of Health (DOH), is hosting this meeting for all metropolitan-area hospitals and residential health care facilities. It will cover clinical aspects of scabies; perspectives and recommendations from a provider with experience managing an outbreak at the facility level; and DOH guidelines on prevention and treatment, reporting requirements, and recommendations for effective communications about scabies upon patient transfer. The program is designed for infection control practitioners, directors of nursing at residential health care facilities, and clinicians responsible for diagnosing skin rashes. For more information contact Roxanne Tena-Nelson, and to register contact Jenifer Fergusson, at GNYHA.

Hospital Emergency Incident Command System

Date: Wednesday, January 29, 2003

Time: Session 1, 8:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m.;

Session 2, 1:00 p.m.–5:00 p.m.

Location: GNYHA Conference Center, 555 West 57th Street, 15th Floor

This briefing, being held twice, will review the elements of the Hospital Emergency Incident Command System (HEICS) and will clarify various staff members' roles in an emergency. Participants will be taken through the responsibilities of the positions outlined in the HEICS command and control structure. Hospitals are encouraged to register staff who work evening, night, and weekend shifts. This program will serve as an adjunct to prior programs employees may have already attended and as a pre-requisite for an upcoming GNYHA session on incident commander development. The North Shore-LIJ Health System's Regional Healthcare Emergency Management Training Center will present the program. For more information contact Terri Straub, and to register contact Barbara Marino, at GNYHA. ■

Update on Important Blood Issues

Voluntary Market Withdrawal of Products:

The American Association of Blood Banks, America's Blood Centers, the American Red Cross, and the U.S. Department of Defense recently recommended a voluntary market withdrawal (a withdrawal initiated by blood collectors, as opposed to regulatory agencies) of certain blood products in order to attempt to reduce the risk of transmission of West Nile virus via blood transfusions. This market withdrawal is being undertaken in cooperation with the Federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The FDA is aware of the withdrawal. The New York Blood Center (NYBC) recently sent letters to hospitals informing them of the procedures relating to the voluntary market withdrawal, which includes quarantining certain products. GNYHA members that have not received information from their blood providers regarding the withdrawal should contact their providers for information.

FDA Guidance on Recipients of Smallpox Vaccine:

Since Phase I of the Federal government's pre-event smallpox vaccinations of public health and health care workers is expected to begin soon, the FDA recently issued final guidance entitled, "Recommendations for Deferral of Donors and Quarantine and Retrieval of Blood and Blood Products in Recent Recipients of Smallpox Vaccine (Vaccinia Virus) and Certain Contacts of Smallpox Vaccine Recipients." The guidance is effective immediately and may be accessed via the FDA Web site, at www.fda.gov/cber/gdlns/smpoxdefquar.pdf.

Blood Shortage: NYBC recently sent a notice to hospitals that contract with it for blood products advising the hospitals of its plans to reduce standing orders for O negative blood beginning on January 3, 2003, due to a low inventory of blood. NYBC attributes the blood shortage to the usual holiday shortage, coupled with a recent snowstorm. NYBC recently issued an emergency media appeal for blood donations and is requesting that hospitals consider hosting blood drives if they have not yet scheduled any. ■