



HCHA Newsletter

Harris County Healthcare Alliance

May 2008
Volume I, Issue 3

Special points of interest:

Quarterly

Membership Meeting

May 14

Speakers:

David Lopez
CEO

Harris County
Hospital District

Ginni Mithoff
President of Board
Harris County Hospital
District Foundation

Plans for expanding primary care, specialty clinics and diagnostic services.

3:00-5:00 p.m.

United Way, Community
Resource Center,
Houston
50 Waugh Drive

Inside this issue:	
ED Use Study	1
Member Spotlight	1
Health Insurance	2
New Policy	2
New Members	2
Grants Awarded	2
Current Events	2

HOUSTON HOSPITALS EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT USE STUDY

The University of Texas School of Public Health published its 2006 annual report on primary care-related use of the emergency department in Harris County. Twenty five hospitals which have emergency departments (EDs) and provide a substantial amount of discounted and free care to the uninsured of Harris County provided ER visit data for the year 2006. Findings include:

- 51.6% of all ER visits by Harris County residents were primary care-related;
- 32.4% of primary care-related visits were by patients who were uninsured, 25.8% had Medicaid, 30.1% had private insurance, and 9.2% had Medicare;
- 34.4% of primary care-related ER visits were by Blacks, 32.5% Hispanics, 25.7% Whites, 2.3 Other, and 1.3% Asian;
- 54.3% of primary care-related ER visits were by adults age 18-64, 38.1% were children and youth

aged 0-17, and 7.6% were adults aged 65 or older;

- The ZIP codes of 77520 (Baytown), 77026 (Northeast), and 77033 (South Park) are among the highest for both frequency and rate of primary care-related ER visits by the uninsured;

- 57.6% of primary care-related visits were by females and 42.4% were by males.

The estimated cost of the 118,698 primary care-related ER visits by uninsured persons was \$66.5 million. If those same visits had taken place in an office-based setting, the estimated cost would have been \$14.4 million – a savings of over \$50 million to the community.

Comparing 2005 and 2006 studies:

- 1) The percentage of total visits and categorized visits that are primary care-related declined from 2005 to 2006 (the first such de-

cline in five years for the original 11 hospitals). Individual hospital changes may vary. More than half of all ER visits are still primary care-related but the percentage declined to 51.6% in 2006 from 53.6% in 2005.

- 2) The peak hour for total ER visits and primary care-related ER visits continues to be midmorning. This is a time at which outpatient clinics would normally be open.

The report shows the critical need for increased access to primary care services in community, safety-net clinics. At the April 3rd report conference attended by over 75 individuals, regional hospital administrators, health plan executives, researchers and community health centers presented information on their programs designed to shift care from the ER to such clinics. To read the complete report or view the program presenta-

(continued pg.2)

Member Spotlight

On March 27, Governor Rick Perry recognized Ibn Sina Medical Center, emphasizing the importance of changing societal paradigms from hospital-based care to encouraging preventive care. "Together with philanthropic organizations like the Ibn Sina Foundation, Texas is mak-

ing great strides to ensuring health coverage for those uninsured Texans who need help the most," said Gov. Perry.

Ibn Sina Community Medical Center brings affordable, high-quality preventive medical care to the immigrant and indi-

gent communities in Houston. Patients receive immunizations, health screenings, low cost lab services, and prescriptions are given free of charge if they are available. The center expects to serve more than 13,000 patients this year.

"The Ibn Sina Community

Medical Center plays an important role in this community, promoting preventive health care and positive lifestyles to all the lives they touch," said Gov. Perry. "Efforts like this exemplify the best of the human spirit and advance our common goal of achieving a happy and healthy Texas." ♦

CONGRATULATIONS IBN SINA COMMUNITY MEDICAL CENTER

Celebrating Its One Year Anniversary of Providing Care to Houston's Neediest

May 2008



Houston Launches Health Insurance Choices Website

“Our community is home to the best health care services in the world,” says Mayor Bill White. Yet he quickly points out that many in our community don’t have health insurance and don’t know how to get it. To help solve this problem, the City launched HoustonHealthChoice.com, a website aimed at giving Houstonians more information about health insurance choices.

HoustonHealthChoice.com offers a menu of online options for individuals, families and small-business owners to compare health plans side-by-side based on monthly premium prices, deductibles and coverage options.

This comes at a time when health care costs are on the rise and Texans who get health insurance through their jobs are seeing dramatic increases in premiums. As stated in the *Chronicle*, “Mounting costs have driven many individuals to opt out of company health plans and some small businesses to stop offering health benefits altogether. As a result, 5.5 million Texans lack health insurance. More than a million of those live in Houston and most have full-time jobs”, White said.

HoustonHealthChoice.com is an easy-to-navigate website that brings a wealth of data together in one central location. Consumers can sort the information in various ways. For example, they can search for plans with premiums under \$100 a month or deductibles under \$500 a year.

“We’ve cut through the complicated health insurance language and created an easy way to shop and compare. Our health insurance plan descriptions are easy to understand and can help you find exactly what you’re looking for.”

White encourages those who are not insured to go online to see if they qualify for a low-cost plan, cautioning they still might not find one they can afford.

The website also provides general information on health insurance and links to other helpful programs such as Medicaid and CHIP, Gateway to Care and the Hospital District’s Gold Card program. ♦

(Adapted from: *City launches website offering help on health plans*, *Houston Chronicle*, April 30, 2008 and; HoustonHealthChoice.com)



Legislative Policy

HCHA’s Legislative Committee has a new policy to help develop its advocacy agenda.

Policy Statement

The Harris County Healthcare Alliance shall lead or support only those legislative or policy agenda items which are aligned with its vision, mission, and strategic goals.

A legislative issue or advocacy request may be presented to HCHA staff by any Alliance Member or community stakeholder. Alliance staff determine if the issue is appropriately aligned with the Alliance’s current strategic goals and the Board-approved Public Policy Platform. Assuming so, further research is conducted to determine what is happening in the broader community regarding the issue. The issue is summarized for the Legislative Committee which then determines the role that the Alliance should take on the issue—i.e. leadership role, supportive role, no role. The recommendation of the Legislative Committee is presented to the Alliance Board for action. ♦

Welcome New Members

Houston Wellness Association has a mission to advance the health and well-being of our community and the economic vitality of Houston’s wellness sector and to transform Houston into a widely modeled city for healthy living. The Alliance and HWA see opportunities to jointly promote wellness among small businesses.

www.houstonwellness.org

Family Services of Greater Houston, a United Way organization, has 7 locations throughout Houston has a mission to provide individuals and families with the counseling and guidance they need to strengthen themselves and their relationships. Family Services and the Alliance share goals to expand access to behavioral health services and increase the co-location of primary care and behavioral health services. www.familyservices.org

Cont’d—ER visits

tions, access the Health Services Research Collaborative at <http://www.sph.uth.tmc.edu/hsrc/> for this and other pertinent documents including presentations by community leaders about strategies to reduce ER visits. ♦

(Adapted from: *Houston Hospitals Emergency Department Use Study*, School of Public Health University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, Charles Begley, Patrick Courtney, Keith Burau-April 2008)

Grants Awarded

Two grants were officially awarded to the Texas Communities Healthcare Coalition to support design and implementation of three-share premium assistance programs to increase access to private healthcare coverage for the uninsured. The Texas Department of Insurance awarded \$660,000, of which \$175,000 will be utilized by HCHA to further Houston’s 3-share product, and the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) awarded \$700,000 towards this program. The Texas Communities Healthcare Coalition is a collaborative of organizations in Galveston, El Paso, Central Texas, and Dallas working with the Alliance and sharing the goal of expanding coverage for the uninsured in their communities. The Alliance’s portion of the combined \$1.36 million in funding exceeds \$400,000 and the Alliance will serve as the fiscal agent for the HHSC-awarded grant. In addition to funding actuarial, marketing, legal and other planning services needed to bring the products to market, funding will also support an economic impact analysis of these programs on their communities. ♦

HCHA recognizes:

- Asian Pacific American Heritage Month
 - National Nurses Week
 - * St. Luke’s Episcopal Health Charities encourages continued support of Project Safety Net by updating your organization’s profile, services and statistical information.
- Be expecting an email from Charities’ Jennifer Rankin.*

