

HEALTH CARE CONSUMER

Spring

Newsletter of the Champaign County Health Care Consumers

1995

Town Meeting on Health Care Reform

Consumers Hold Legislators Accountable

"There are people who will tell you that there is nothing wrong with America's current health care system. I am here to say otherwise," began Mr. Kim Eugene Hill. Mr. Hill, who has diabetes, has been denied coverage due to insurance company policies on "pre-existing conditions." On October 17, CCHCC held a town meeting to hold elected officials accountable for their continued lack of progress on health care reform. Members of the audience had the opportunity to provide consumer testimony by sharing personal experiences, or to direct questions to representatives

and politicians. "This was an opportunity for the legislators to hear from the people, not just special interests," said Charles Segard, a member of the Universal Health Care Committee.

National level issues can make local consumers feel helpless. Holding legislators accountable becomes difficult, because decision-making occurs in Washington D.C., with policy implementation taking several months (if not years) to enact. Consumer experiences, in contrast, are immediate. It is important to express

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Rural Health Project Begins

Linda and Roy Johnson are new parents living in rural Champaign County. Like many low-to-moderate income workers, neither Linda nor Roy's job provides health insurance. Since their income level exceeds governmental standards for Public Aid, they decided they would need to budget the cost of immunizations for their baby. When Linda called a local hospital, she was surprised to learn that immunizations for her baby over the next 18 months would total over \$450. She and Roy are afraid they will not be able to afford this necessary preventive measure.

Though Linda and Roy Johnson are not actual people, their situation is a familiar one for thousands of Champaign County residents. Along with having to travel long distances to visit the nearest hospital or clinic, many rural residents find they have

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Then-State Representative Laurel Prussing addresses the panel and audience members at last fall's town meeting.

Health Care Consumer

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44 E. Main, Suite 208
Champaign, IL 61820
(217) 352-6533

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CCHCC Welcomes New Staff Members

CCHCC would like to welcome five new staff members who have joined us during the last few months. First, Ean Barnard became our new Administrative Assistant in October. Ean has lived in Champaign since 1989, when he came to study History at the University of Illinois. Ean has served as Chairperson of the Student Advisory Council to the Illinois State Board of Education and also is a former president of the University of Illinois group People for Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Concerns.

Danielle Campbell has joined our staff as a student intern. Danielle, a

senior at the University of Illinois in the Department of Community Health, serves as Hotline Coordinator. Danielle spent her junior year in England, where she did comparative studies between the American and British health system.

Lula Jones, a longtime Champaign resident, has joined our staff as our afternoon receptionist. Shineka Ammons and Janelle Lehmann also have joined our staff through the Federal Work Study Program at the University of Illinois. We welcome all of our new staff members!



First row: Nisha Rathi, Myrtle Chatman, Hildra Powell, Danielle Campbell, and Ponrat Pakpreo. Back row: Jacqui Davis, Ruth Michaelis, Ean Barnard, Jessica Hill, Catherine Crandall, and Laura Kurre.

What is MediPlan Plus?

In recent months, you may have read in the paper about the state's proposal to overhaul its Medicaid program. Gov. Edgar is seeking federal approval in the form of a waiver to begin MediPlan Plus, a wholly inadequate, managed care program for Medicaid recipients. MediPlan Plus has many problems, but two of the most severe are: 1) it tries to control health care costs and save the state money at the expense of the poor; and 2) it institutionalizes a two-tiered health care delivery system, with a lower quality of care for those on Medicaid.

Without the waiver, the state can't start MediPlan Plus. If this issue concerns you, please get involved by attending the next Universal Health Care committee meeting (see main article page 3). We need your input and energy!

CCHCC Briefs

Bingo

CCHCC's Holiday Bingo, a community tradition since the 1970s, was held December 5 at the Urbana Civic Center, faring better than ever. Well over 200 players turned out for the food and fun, with some anxious attendees arriving 4 hours before the start of the games.

Staff and volunteers worked hard to make the event a success., and the enthusiastic enterprising of community activist and longtime CCHCC supporter John Lee Johnson added to the carnival atmosphere. In addition, volunteers from the U of I Torch Society pitched in to help set up for the event and serve food, and we are grateful for their help.

Ms. Hilda Powell, CCHCC Receptionist, supporter, and longtime Bingo fan, captured the feelings of many as the event drew to a close. "I had a great time, and am glad to help such a good cause," she said. "I just wish I had won that \$500 jackpot."

We appreciate everyone's help, which will support our work on rural and children's health, and hope to see even more Bingo fans this summer.

Medicare 100/Plus Reaches Out

Medicare 100/Plus Organizer Myrtle Chatman met recently with a group of 23 seniors at Washington Square Apartments in Champaign to share information about the programs. Started in 1984 by CCHCC's Senior Task Force, the programs reduce out-of-pocket medical expenses for seniors over 65, as well as disabled individuals. The next presentation will be at the Youman Center in Rantoul. If you would like to have a presentation at your apartment complex or senior center, please call Myrtle at 352-6533.

Universal Care Committee

Though the health care reform debate may have lost steam in the national arena, the local debate will continue to get input from the

committed group of individuals who make up the CCHCC Universal Health Care Committee. At their last meeting, members expressed a desire to continue to work for health care reform, and to participate in the organizing activities of the Campaign for Better Health Care (CBHC), our statewide coalition for reform.

The committee will continue to participate in CBHC's Phone Action Network, whereby 2800 concerned citizens across the state make monthly calls to key targets to apply pressure and show our strength. Participants need not be committee members to join in the local branch of the network. In fact, this is an excellent way for members to participate in a way that doesn't take more than a few minutes a month, and can be done in your own home. Please call Catherine at 352-6533, and you will immediately be relieved of that nasty guilt you've been feeling.

Another way the committee will continue to participate in the debate is through participation in the Letters to the Editor campaign. Each month, a timely letter is produced regarding health care reform, and sent to newspapers all over the state. Our local committee has over 20 newspapers in the region which receive the letters. This is a very effective way to keep issues in the news. Letters on universal care are welcome, and CCHCC members are encouraged to submit their letters for distribution across the state.

Finally, the committee will continue to hold monthly meetings, focusing on education and action. One of the main issues we will be addressing (in conjunction with CBHC) is MediPlan Plus, the state's planned overhaul of the Medicaid program (see sidebar page 2). If you would like more information or have suggestions for future agenda items, please call Ponrat at 352-6533.

At our January meeting, Bill Creswell was elected as chair for 1995. In addition, Marion Gushee was elected co-chair/secretary. All who are interested are welcome, and encouraged to attend our monthly meetings, held the third Tuesday of each month at 7:00 pm in the CCHCC offices. See you there!

Advocacy and Referral Program

In the past several months, we have integrated the Hotline and Dental Referral Programs into a new Advocacy and Referral Program. Eleven new volunteer advocates from the September training session worked with over 90 consumers last quarter. One advocate became a specialist for the Dental Referral Program, which referred 35 clients to subsidized dental care in the first six months. In January, we welcomed Danielle Campbell, an intern from the Department of Community Health at the University of Illinois. She will be working with the program for the next several months.

What does it take to be an advocate? All that is necessary is good communication and problem solving skills, and some free time during the week. If you are interested in becoming a Hotline volunteer, please contact Ruth at 352-6533 to schedule an interview.

Opening Doors

Opening Doors in Champaign County is a demonstration project designed to eliminate barriers to reproductive health care for African American women. The program is funded by the Robert Wood Johnson and Kaiser Family Foundations. This project represents a multi-pronged approach to enjoin African-American women, across economic class, with four health care institutions in the Champaign-Urbana metro area: Carle Foundation and Hospital, C-U Public Health District, Frances Nelson Health Center, and Planned Parenthood.

Project staff have introduced the program to sororities, women's groups, Housing Authority representatives and tenants, and groups such as the YWCA, Urban League, U of I Department of Community Health, Parkland College, C-U African American AIDS Project, Central Black Student Union, and the Human Services Council.

Focus groups have also met in the four collaborating institutions to get feedback and perspective from providers. To find out how you can get involved, call Jessica or Jacqui at 352-6533.

Town Meeting

Continued from page 1

this reality to legislators, who may become distanced from local issues. "Many legislators during the summer said that we had to put individuals' personal stories aside to focus on the big picture, but what they don't understand is that these individuals are the big picture," explained Urbana resident David Clarkin.

During the open testimonial period, inadequate insurance or an inability to gain insurance coverage were common themes. After his employer changed insurance plans, Don Robinson suffered the consequences of inadequate insurance. "This coverage was not as good as the coverage we had before, but it wasn't until I really needed it that I knew just how bad it was," he said. Many individuals with insurance believe they are adequately covered for medical care, but when they receive bills, many read this statement: "These expenses exceed the amount of allowable benefit based on cost management unit care review. The excluded amount represents charges in excess of reasonable and customary fees." Don Robinson read this statement and, like many others, became caught between his insurance company and the hospital where he received care.

Many other audience members expressed their frustration with the health insurance industry. When her insurance company threatened to raise the premiums of other members in a small business pool, Carolyn Guenther and her husband were forced to take their severely injured son off their insurance plan. "We could not ethically choose to put our employees in that position. I understand why the insurance company did this, but I believe that once they made a contract, they should honor that contract. If you can't depend on the coverage when you most need it, then what's the point? It gives people a false sense of hope and security."

Other community members

expressed a variety of concerns about the current system. The high cost of health care was reiterated, as many described family members who completely used up their life savings to pay for medical care. Mental health needs, often not covered in insurance or HMO plans, were addressed by several people. Women's health issues such as reproductive choice, breast and cervical cancer, and the inclusion of women as subjects in medical research were also raised.

In addition to re-emphasizing the need for health care reform, the event tested our ability as constituents to hold our elected officials accountable. Present were then-State Representative Laurel Prussing and Congressional candidate Paul Alexander. The only legislator attending the event, Representative

Unfortunately, many of these surrogates could not answer questions or speak on behalf of their legislator or candidate. "It seemed odd, and was very disappointing for those of us who planned this event, that so many of our legislators could not find the time to attend and hear from the people they represent," said Catherine Crandall, one of the event's organizers.

The absence of the politicians spoke clearly about the lack of public accountability in our political system. Margie Skirvin, President of the Champaign County Chapter of the National Organization of Women (NOW), wrote, "We need to get the message across to the policy-makers that health care is necessary for all people in order to have a fair and fully functioning society." The



More than sixty community members attended last fall's town meeting.

Prussing stated that she was glad to be at the town meeting to hear moving testimony from community members about their experiences with the health care system. She also appreciated the opportunity to address the audience regarding her position on health care issues.

After many invitations, some candidates and legislators who declined to attend sent representatives to listen to testimony and read written statements on their behalf. These included representatives from candidate Rick Winkel, State Representative Tim Johnson, candidate James Anderson, and Senator Carol Moseley-Braun.

disfunctionality of our health care system, which is at a level requiring national reform, reflects our inability to gain access to our legislators and hold them accountable to our concerns and needs.

The town meeting's co-sponsors included: the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (ASFCME) Local 3700; Frances Nelson Health Center (FNHC); Graduate Employees Organization (GEO); Illinois Education Association (IEA); National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP); National Organization of Women (NOW); Service Employees International Union (SEIU); United Professional

Rural Health

from page 1

owhere to turn when looking for affordable, basic health services.

CCHCC first became aware of the magnitude of the problem through the work of the Children's Health Task Force. While initially focusing on the need for immunization services and nutritional programs outside of Champaign-Urbana, the Task Force discovered that several other basic health needs were unmet. Parents, school personnel, and social workers spoke of the great need for dental care, eye care, pre- and postnatal care, pediatric care, and mental health services in rural areas.

The Task Force also became aware of a startling fact: Champaign County is *one of only nine counties* in Illinois without a county-wide Public Health Department. As a result, a number of Public Health services,

including immunizations, are not permanently accessible at low cost to rural residents.

A primary concern being expressed by residents involves the **lack of immunization services**. Public Health reports show that contagious diseases like measles and pertussis still pose a threat in this country, yet *one out of three* children under the age of two do not receive the proper vaccinations. A 1993 pertussis outbreak in downstate Illinois was a reminder that this disease, though symptomatically similar to the common cold, can be fatal, especially in infants. Influenza, which is a more common illness, contributes to 10,000-20,000 deaths per year, including **4,000 Illinois residents**. It's clear that people who do not get flu shots, specifically seniors and patients with chronic lung problems like asthma, are at a greater risk for complications.

solely on the goodwill of a few nurses. Unfortunately, these fears have since been realized; CCHCC staff recently learned that the immunization clinics have been discontinued indefinitely due to the retirement of the volunteer nurse coordinator.

Other concerns being voiced surround the availability of affordable preventive health services such as blood pressure testing, cholesterol screening, maternal health, and general health education. Preventive medicine has proven itself to be essential in the defense against serious illnesses. For example, early treatment of high blood pressure has resulted in a **50%** reduction in mortality from coronary artery disease since 1972. Some residents, however, describe these services as either temporary or nonexistent. Though many rural residents get these services at periodic doctor visits, the elderly or those who have difficulty traveling to Champaign or Urbana often do not get adequate health care on a regular basis.

With the upcoming retirement of a few key doctors in rural Champaign County, the lack of basic health services for these residents takes on a new seriousness. A report by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association states that, although rural residents tend to have similar health care needs as those living in urban areas, they are less likely to have health coverage, and pay a larger share of their own health care expenses. Lack of health insurance, along with poor accessibility of services, too often puts preventive care low on the list of priorities.

Project Coordinators at CCHCC are currently working on a qualitative needs assessment to pinpoint specific weaknesses in rural health care, as well as potential solutions to these problems. Input from parents, school personnel, health care providers, and anyone living in rural Champaign County is vital to the research process. Concerned citizens should contact Nisha, Catherine, or Ponrat at CCHCC to find out various ways in which they can join in helping to improve the health of their community. Clearly the time has come for all residents of Champaign County to have access to basic health care.

Did you know...?

Champaign County is one of only nine Illinois counties without a county-wide Public Health Department.

The volunteer-run immunization clinics, which provided low-cost vaccinations to thousands of rural children in Champaign County, were discontinued in October of 1994.

Of the 50 million Americans living in rural areas, more than 21 million live in areas that inadequately serve their primary health care needs.

employees (UPE); U of I Student Government Association (SGA); U of I MCA; and A Woman's Fund.

GEO representative Toby Higbie emphasized the importance of public accountability by saying, "Regardless of employment status, every resident of the United States deserves access to basic health care. Our society has the wealth to do this, it's just a question of whether we have the political will." We need to continue to make health care a priority among our elected officials.

Copies of consumer testimony and co-sponsor statements are available. If you are interested, or would like to become more involved, please contact Catherine or Ponrat at 22-6533.

In the past, rural residents ineligible for Medicaid relied heavily on the volunteer immunization clinics or the Frances Nelson Health Center in Champaign for vaccinations. However, the long waiting periods for appointments at Frances Nelson, sometimes up to months, often results in children having an incomplete vaccination series at the start of the school year. The volunteer clinics, held periodically in Sidney, Mahomet and Rantoul, were well utilized and offered immunizations at a low cost to all rural residents.

Several people interviewed, however, expressed fears about the temporary nature of this volunteer effort, realizing that the clinics function

ADVOCATE'S ADVICE:

Can't Afford Needed Care?

Each day CCHCC receives several calls on its Consumer Health Hotline from consumers in need of help. In an effort to share information on some of the most common calls we receive, Advocate's Advice is a regular column in the newsletter. The column this issue offers some advice on low cost services.

One of the most difficult issues we face in today's society is the inability to afford decent health care. Health care costs have skyrocketed out of reach for most consumers. One either has to pay for expensive insurance, apply for Medical assistance programs, or go without any insurance. Often we get no health care at all unless we must deal with a critical emergency.

However, there are some options in our community for finding low cost services. These options are listed to the right. Information was current as of February 6, but please verify this information when calling; policy and procedures are always subject to change.

CCHCC's Consumer Health Hotline (352-6533) is in operation from 9-5, M - F. The Health Hotline is a free public service provided by the Health Care Consumers. It is staffed by trained volunteer advocates who can assist consumers with questions or complaints about a variety of health-related topics. Patient rights, medical record access, billing problems, local social support services, public health concerns, Medicaid and Medicare problems are just a few of the issues that can be addressed. We are here to serve you!

Primary Care

Frances Nelson Health Center in Champaign is staffed by primary care physicians and nurses and offers a full range of health care services for adults and children. Some of the clinic services include social service programs, dental services, patient education, and lab services. Financial arrangements for referrals (specialist consultations and x-ray services) are made with the outside provider. The clinic does serve Medicaid recipients and all services are offered on a sliding fee scale. Call the clinic at 356-1558 from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm.

Discuss payment options with your health care provider. If you know in advance that you will probably have difficulty paying a medical bill, then inform the physician or provider of your concern. It is well within your rights to discuss payment options with you doctor or health care facility. Generally, it is best to have this discussion in person at the doctor's office. The more direct and personal the contact, the more effective your appeal is likely to be. If an agreement is reached, you should request that it be verified in writing. With this written record, it would be very difficult for them to take you to court or to deny future care because of non-payment.

Hospital Care

Both Carle Foundation Hospital and Covenant Medical Center have free and low-cost programs available to low-income consumers who do not have insurance and are not eligible for Medicaid or Medicare. Be sure to ask specifically for these programs.

Community Care Program (Carle)
Contact: Martha Miller
383-3034

Covenant Care Program
Contact: Vicky Anderson
337-2866

Pre-Natal Care

Pre-natal programs for low-income women are offered through C-U Public Health District (352-7961), Planned Parenthood (359-8022), and Frances Nelson Health Center (356-1558).

Dental Care

C-U Public Health District provides free dental care for all residents of the twin cities from ages 3 to 18. Non-residents with a medical card are also accepted. Call the office at 352-7961 during regular business hours.

Frances Nelson Health Center provides dental care on a sliding fee scale and accepts all Medicaid and Medicare programs. The clinic offers preventative, acute and limited restoration services. There are no age restrictions. Currently, the clinic is taking emergency appointments only but will resume full services on April 1, 1995. Call the clinic at 356-1558.

Parkland College's Dental Hygiene students provide dental cleanings and x-rays for a fee of \$10 per semester. There is no charge for children under 12 (Children under 4 not served), adults over 62, Medicaid recipients, or Public Aid recipients. Call the Dental Hygiene Clinic, Parkland College at 351-2221 to schedule an appointment. Expect to have as many appointments as necessary to complete a cleaning.

Champaign County Health Care Consumers' Dental Referral Program allows low income Champaign County residents to have a dental examination and x-rays for \$15. Additional services are provided on a sliding fee scale. For more information contact the CCHCC office (352-6533) to schedule an interview and be referred to a participating dentist.

C-U Denture Service/Dr. Scott Brewer offers dentures at the reduced rate of \$199 a plate or \$398 a set. Free consultation if dentures are needed. Extractions are \$20. To schedule an appointment, call 351-3035 and leave a message for your call to be returned. Dr. Brewer only accepts cash, checks, and credit cards.

Volunteer Profile

Stacy Young

Suggesting a needy cause to Stacy Young is like lighting a match to kindling -- she bursts into action with flamelike intensity. Full of enthusiasm for making the world a better place, all it takes to get her going is a suggestion and a little direction.

A senior at the University of Illinois, Stacy plans to become a physician, specializing in either women's health or pediatrics. An internship brought her to CCHCC as a Hotline Advocate, but she plans to continue her volunteer work after the internship ends. She feels the experience will enhance her work as a doctor. "I've learned a lot about insurance, Medicare, and Medicaid," says Stacy. "I feel it's important to know, not just the provider side of health care, but the patient side as well."

During the five hours a week that she volunteers her time, she answers the Hotline phones, researches problems for clients, and offers follow-up to help clients solve their own problems. She gets satisfaction from being able to help clients with advice and support. Recalling an exciting recent incident, she smiles. "A woman had encountered problems getting coverage from her insurance company, until I got involved. We connected her with a journalist who reported her story in the Wall Street Journal. After that, her coverage problems disappeared, and she felt very grateful. It was great to be involved in a happy ending."

Stacy quotes Margaret Mead as a source of inspiration: Never underestimate the power of a small group of dedicated people to change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever does.

"I believe you can change things," Stacy says. Putting her beliefs in action, Stacy has also made time between her studies to coordinate the I Blood Drive each year since

1992, and has also found time for the Special Projects program of Minority Women in Science.

Visiting her father, mother, and sister in Princeton, Illinois, and testing her tennis skills also rank high on Stacy's list. Although she's enjoyed her four years here in Champaign, she feels anxious to move on. After a December, 1995 graduation, she hopes to attend a west coast medical school.

Luckily, graduation is still most of a year away, and CCHCC will enjoy the benefits of having Stacy around for a while longer. When describing Stacy, Volunteer Coordinator Ruth Michaelis uses adjectives like "enthusiastic," "willing," "fun," and "responsible." In particular, Ruth says that Stacy "takes on a task and makes it happen. She really does a great job!"

Stacy sees the people at CCHCC



performing a valuable role. "They're helping others in a personal way, as well as making people aware of the need for health care reform." She goes on to commend CCHCC for the staff's commitment to the beliefs behind the work. Listening to her sincerity, and watching her warm smile and lively expression, it's easy to see why she blends in so naturally at CCHCC. She's one of the caring people -- one of us!



CCHCC is currently seeking concerned community members for several positions on our program staff. The positions, which are funded

through the AmeriCorp VISTA Program, involve community organizing in areas such as rural health, children's health, dental health, health care access, volunteer coordination, and project fundraising. For more info, contact Laura at 352-6533.

CCHCC MEMBERSHIP FORM

(Please clip out and return with your membership dues.)

Enclosed is my check for: \$ _____

\$50 - Friends of CCHCC

\$36 - Family Membership/Adopt-A-Senior

\$25 - Individual Membership

\$15 - Seniors Citizens/Students/Fixed Income

Change of Address:

Name/Phone: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Contributions to CCHCC are tax-deductible.

Please return to: CCHCC, 44 E. Main, Suite 208, Champaign, IL 61820

Over 150 volunteers gave up one or more of their nights to help with the event, with large support coming from student groups such as: Allen Hall, Lincoln Avenue, Hopkins Hall, both the Pennsylvania Avenue and Illinois Street Residence Hall Councils, the Residence Hall Association, Intervarsity Christian Fellowship, the Progressive Resource Coalition, Sigma Phi Delta, Tau Epsilon Phi, Kappa Sigma, Gamma Phi Beta, and Alpha Gamma Delta.

Special thanks to the following volunteers:

Grace Adams
Marie Adams
Gary Adelman
Julie Aden
Jessie Allen
Lisa Alvarez
Iney Anderson
Shane Anderson
Ed Apy
Rowena Arbiter
Sonia Beil
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Adam Sis
Jason Smith
Sarah Smith
Nicole Stack
Alice Stewart
Mike Stewart
Randi Storch
Cindy Stutz
Kate Sullivan
Daniel Vitchabanda
Linda Walker
Mike Wilson
Juliana Wong
Pam Wood
Kristin Wuich
Jeff Young
Stacy Young
You all did a Terrific Job!

Phone-a-Thon a Big Success

This year's annual Phonathon, held last September and October, was a huge success by any standard. Volunteer callers recorded over \$15,000 in pledges, and an additional amount of over \$2,000 was pledged by the CCHCC Board and staff. Unspecified and undeclared contributions were expected to push the total over the \$20,000 goal. "I think we have alot to celebrate," said VISTA volunteer Dave Clarkin. "Not just because we reached our goal, but because we had so many volunteers turn out to make calls, showing their commitment to the organization."

Special thanks to:

**The Art Theatre
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Kirby Foods
The Blind Pig
Grandy's
Eagle Foods
The Spaghetti Shop
Lil' Porgy's
McDonald's
Jewel Foods
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