

CCHCC



Health Care Consumer

Newsletter of the
Champaign County Health Care Consumers

Grassroots community organizing for health care justice since 1977

Lennhoff nets national award for health care leadership



By BRENNER ERFFORD
CCHCC Staff

In September 2002, CCHCC Executive Director Claudia Lennhoff was awarded the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Community Health Leadership Program award, a prestigious national honor conferred to 10 outstanding community health leaders who work to expand access to health care and social services to underserved

populations and communities. Lennhoff was chosen from a field of 463 nominees for the honor.

"This (award) is a real honor and tribute to the work of the Health Care Consumers," said Lennhoff. "With this award, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Community Health Leadership Program is making a real investment in the Champaign County Health Care Consumers so that we can continue our work.

We are very honored and pleased."

The award brings with it a financial stipend for the recipient as well as \$105,000 for the recipient's organization. CCHCC plans to use a part of the money to create a sustaining fund.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the largest private philanthropy dedicated to improving health and health care for Americans, selected Lennhoff for her leadership in grassroots community organizing efforts, which have resulted in many local and regional victories for Champaign County residents, including the creation of the Champaign County Public Health Department. Under Lennhoff's leadership, CCHCC has been instrumental in the creation of the Child Dental Access Program through the Champaign County Public Health Department; the creation of the Champaign County Community Health Partnership; new efforts to address problems of medical debt collections

CCHCC Executive Director Claudia Lennhoff receives the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Community Health Leadership Program award from Steven Schroeder, M.D., president of the Foundation.
—Photo by Leslie E. Kossoff of LK Photos

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CCHCC

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Provena's Broken Covenant



Concerned citizens and CCHCC members participate in a direct action protest at Provena Covenant Medical Center, Urbana, on Nov. 1, 2002.

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Health Care Consumer

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Dear Friends,

Welcome to CCHCC's quarterly newsletter! We have resumed regular production of our quarterly newsletters so that all of our members and supporters can keep up with all the exciting and important work CCHCC is doing.

I want to extend my deepest gratitude to all of you – our members and supporters who have contributed to and led the work of our organization over the past 25 years. Your involvement and support is what makes CCHCC a strong and effective organization.

Director's Note

Claudia Lennhoff

Over the past year, we have won many victories, undertaken many important campaigns for health care access and health care justice and received national recognition for our work.

Even as we work at the local level to address health care issues affecting our community, we are also involved in advocating for policy at the state and national levels.

And our nation is in desperate need for our kind of citizen involvement and for a real consumer voice in the health care system. Our government, as represented by the Bush Administration, seems to have an unflagging and unashamed obsession with pleasing and supporting industry rather than working for the public good and our nation's health. The current proposal to

force Medicare beneficiaries into private health plans in order for them to get prescription drug coverage is a perfect example. Too many other such examples make it clear that the real intended beneficiaries of health care reform proposals are the insurance and pharmaceutical industries. These are the same industries making record profits during times of national economic hardship and the unprecedented financial devastation of millions of individuals and families.

And yet our government is floating proposals that will result in more money being poured into these industries while less is spent on direct patient care for fewer of us.

Sounds grim, doesn't it? But the good news is that people all over the nation are rising up and joining local, statewide and national consumer health advocacy efforts to lend their voices to the call for a change – a real and meaningful change resulting in health care for all.

CCHCC is well-positioned to be part of that movement and to lend Champaign County's voice to the national call for health care for all, even as we continue our grassroots organizing efforts for health care justice and access.

Again, my deepest thanks to you, and I look forward to our continued work together.

Claudia

Reports available from CCHCC

As part of the Champaign County Health Care Consumers' educational mission, CCHCC produces reports on a variety of health care topics, including issues pertaining to health care access, patient health and safety, public safety and social justice.

Is Your Hospital's Nurse Staffing Safe? How You Can Find Out. A

Consumer's Guide to Understanding Hospital Nursing Staff Levels and Patient Health and Safety. (December 2002).

How Medical Debt Affects Champaign County Health Care Consumers: A Community Report on Medical Debt-Related Bankruptcies and Small Claims Lawsuits. By CCHCC's Medical Billing Task Force (July 11, 2002).

Covenant Hospital: 5 Years After Provena. Has Only the Name Changed? A

Community Report on Provena Health Corporation and Changes at Provena Covenant Medical Center (August 2002).

Champaign County - A Community at Risk: Health Care Out of Reach. A Report on Access to Health Care in Champaign County, Illinois. By CCHCC in partnership with The Access Project at Brandeis University (March 2001).

Gender Inequities at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign: UIUC Female Employees at Economic Disadvantage. A Comparative

Report on UIUC Female Employees' Pay and Benefits by the Women's Health Task Force (April 16, 2002).

A Preventable Problem: Gun-Related Deaths Among Illinois Youth. A Community Report by CCHCC's Gun Regulation Project (August 30, 2002).

Take action on assault weapons

By BROOKE ANDERSON
CCHCC Organizer

CCHCC has begun an exciting new project to reauthorize and strengthen the Federal Assault Weapons Ban as part of an overall project to regulate guns as consumer products. This project draws upon CCHCC's strengths in consumer advocacy and public health and grassroots organizing to mobilize community support for legislation that would reduce gun violence in our communities.

Civilian assault weapons are semi-automatic versions of military weapons designed to rapidly lay down a wide field of fire, often called "hosing down" an area. This increased lethality makes them particularly dangerous in civilian use. In 1994, Congress passed and President Clinton signed a ban on the production of certain semi-automatic assault weapons and high capacity ammunition magazines. This 1994 law banned a list of 19 specific assault weapons and other assault weapons incorporating certain design characteristics. The law is scheduled to sunset on Sept. 13, 2004, and if not reauthorized, it will be perfectly legal for the gun industry to begin mass-producing and marketing semi-automatic military-style assault weapons like AK-47s and Uzis to civilians.

Immediately after the 1994 law was enacted, the gun industry moved quickly to make slight design changes in its guns to evade the law. The gun industry is literally making a killing by evading this law. Reauthorization of the ban must include substantial improvements to prevent the gun industry from continuing to flood America's streets with these deadly weapons.

CCHCC is urging community members to tell Congress that our community's safety and well-being outweighs the gun industry's interest in increasing its profits.

In the 106th Congress, legislation will be introduced to reauthorize the ban and strengthen it in such a way as to prevent the gun industry from circumventing it. We are urging community members to tell Congress that our community's safety and well-being outweigh the gun industry's interest in increasing its profits.

CCHCC is currently receiving support from the Consumer Federation of America Foundation to mobilize local and statewide support for this federal legislation. If you are interested in receiving more information, helping with this project or being added to the gun regulation project mailing list, call Brooke Anderson at 352-6533 or email her at brooke@shout.net. If an organization in which you are involved is interested in endorsing the legislation or inviting someone to speak about gun regulation at one of your upcoming meetings, please contact CCHCC at 352-6533.



Ask the Advocate

CCHCC Hotline 352-6533
.....

Q: I'm considered lower-income. I don't have insurance and I can't afford the dental care that I need. Is there any place in the area where I can go to get affordable dental care?

A: The lack of affordable dental services available is one of the biggest access-to-care problems in Champaign County. The only program in the county that offers dental care at a discount for adults over the age of 18 is the Dental Referral Program (DRP). The DRP is available to all residents of Champaign County over the age of 18 living in households with incomes below 185 percent of the poverty line.

In order to qualify for the program, individuals must 1) call the DRP coordinator and set up an eligibility screening meeting in the CCHCC office; 2) fill out the DRP application; and 3) provide proof of county residency in the form of a driver's license, a state ID or a piece of mail; and 4) provide documentation of all household income in the form of check stubs, bank statements, etc.

When the application is complete and all necessary documentation has been provided, eligible applicants will be put on the DRP waiting list. Since our dentists only accept a limited number of new DRP patients per month, clients may have to wait several weeks for their first appointment. When the client's turn comes on the waiting list, the DRP Coordinator will contact the client and a dentist to set up an initial appointment.

The initial appointment will include an oral exam and x-rays at a flat rate of \$15. Additional services are then arranged between the dentist and the patient,

We're looking for a few good board members.

CCHCC is seeking volunteers to serve on its Board of Directors. Serving as a board member is a great way to contribute and get involved with CCHCC's work. The board meets once monthly.

Interested parties may contact Claudia Lennhoff at 352-6533, ext. 11.

See ADVOCATE, pg. 10

When Provena Health Corporation took over Covenant Hospital five years ago, it promised that only the name had changed. But a new community report questions whether the new owner of our community hospital is truly dedicated to serving the needs of our community.

Provena's Broken Covenant

By BILL MUELLER
and CLAUDIA LENNHOF

On Aug. 22, 2002, CCHCC released a report titled "Covenant Hospital: 5 Years After Provena." The report investigates the state of Covenant Medical Center and Provena Health corporation, and was written in response to numerous concerns and complaints by patients, Provena nurses and physicians and community members regarding quality of care and patient health and safety at the hospital since Provena took over. Former Provena nurses Faith Henson, Pat Wedig and Nikki Hurley, who were all fired after speaking out about patient health and safety issues at Provena Covenant, assisted in preparing the report.

"When Provena first acquired Covenant hospital, Provena's billboard ads stated that 'Only the name has changed,'" said CCHCC Executive Director Claudia Lennhoff. "Then Provena dumped the Medicare 100 and Plus Programs without warning and has never truly answered to the community for this behavior. Since then, Provena has dumped nurses who advocate for patient health and safety; they have dumped longstanding physicians; they are suing low-income patients; and we get quality of care complaints constantly, mostly regarding inadequate staffing. It is clear that much more than the name has changed, but not for the better."

Upon the release of the report, former Provena nurse Pat Wedig said, "It is time for our community to question these changes and develop a voice for asserting our needs as a community and ensuring

the protection of our local hospital and its workers." Former Provena nurse Faith Henson added, "Any one of us could end up in the hospital at any time. We need our hospital to be strong and well-staffed."

The report raises serious questions about whether Provena Health is operating Covenant Hospital in a way that puts its business plan before the needs of our community.

Community concerns discussed and documented in the report include the following:

- Changes in staffing levels that have resulted in increased patient workloads for nurses and other staff and concerns about patient health and safety as a result of these changes;

- Decisions to fire outspoken patient advocate nurses concerned about patient health and safety and working conditions for hospital employees;

- Provena's questionable financial stewardship of the hospital. Although Provena reports that financial hardship has forced it to enact hospital staff cuts while, it is investing in new office buildings in our community to house its for-profit ventures;

- Provena's aggressive and coercive debt collection practices against low-income families, seniors and people

with disabilities on fixed incomes;

- Provena's lawsuits against low-income people;

- Provena's decision to contract out many hospital functions, including dialysis, pharmacy, lab testing and more to large national for-profit

corporations, while simultaneously continuing to claim property tax-exemption as a non-profit charitable hospital. Are these for-profit corporations providing cost-savings to patients? Does Provena have financial interests in these corporations? Has the non-profit, tax-exempt hospital become a "shell" for for-profit corporations?

- Provena's allowance of its for-profit

contractors to enact cost-cutting measures which harm patients, such as the dialysis unit's decision to no longer provide linens to its patients, forcing them to bring their own pillows and blankets.

"Clearly, these concerns are too important to go unanswered," said CCHCC Board Member Rev. Jim Holiman. "We have called on Provena Covenant administrator Diane Friedman to meet with the community in order to talk about these issues and to answer our questions." Ms. Friedman has publicly refused to meet with the community, and has instead chosen to

"It is time for our community to question these changes and develop a voice for asserting our needs as a community and ensuring the protection of our local hospital and its workers."

— Former Provena nurse Pat Wedig

"Doctors, nurses, other hospital staff, not to mention patients, talk about retaliation from the hospital administration. You have to ask yourself, 'Who are these administrators, and are they the kind of people who should be running a faith-based community hospital?'"

— CCHCC Volunteer Dan Mills, responding to the No Confidence vote taken by Provena's medical staff and their subsequent refusal to appear on camera for WICD-TV's coverage.

conduct an expensive media campaign to both attack CCHCC and the fired Provena nurses, and to attempt to portray the hospital as a victim of baseless accusations.

"Provena spent thousands of dollars on full-page newspaper ads, attacking us," said community member Martin Nieto. "Why don't they put that money into hospital staffing and patient care, and into real community relations? We have real concerns about what is going on at our hospital. We deserve the courtesy of a real response, not the insult of a PR campaign."

CCHCC and hundreds of concerned community members have followed up on the report's release and Provena's response with several events and actions, including post-cards to Provena Health's CEO, requesting a meeting with officials from the parent corporation. The parent corporation refused to meet, claiming that the decisions affecting Covenant hospital are made by Covenant administration and the local hospital Board of Directors.

Upon Ms. Friedman's and Provena Health corporation's refusals to meet with the community, CCHCC and the community turned its attention to seeking dialogue with the hospital's local Board of Directors. But Provena officials refuse to provide the names of local Board members and have instead chosen to keep their identities secret.

"Why are they hiding from the community?" asked community member

John Hilty.

Provena's medical staff reported that they held a meeting in late October 2002 where they took a "No Confidence" vote on Provena Covenant administration.

doctors would appear on camera, reportedly because they feared retaliation from hospital administration.

The community followed suit by taking its own "No Confidence" vote

Case in Point: For-profit dialysis at Provena

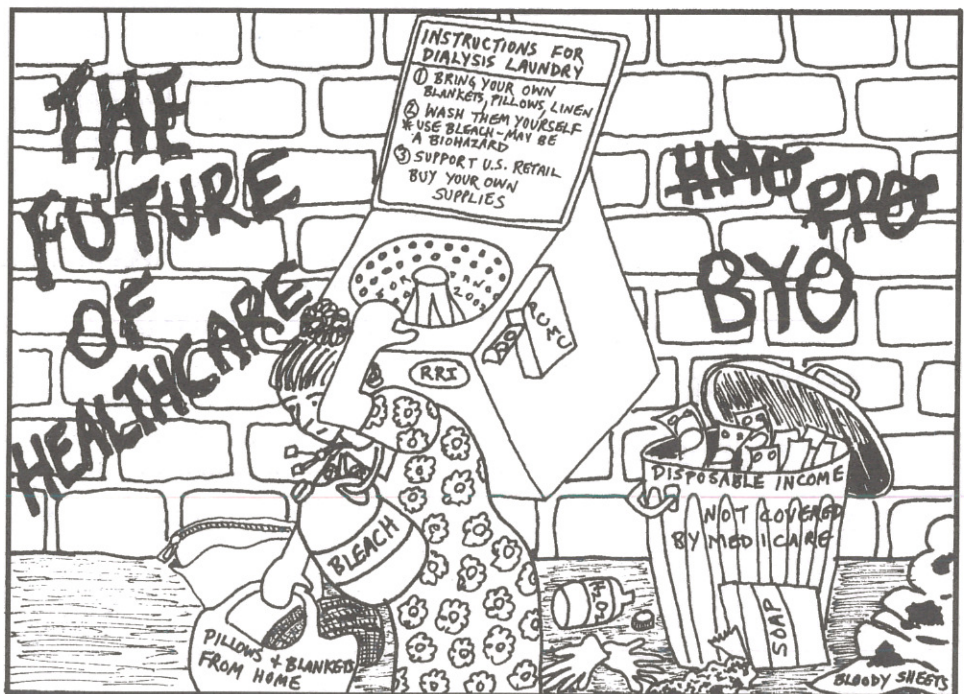


Illustration by Patrick Jordan

Renal Research Institute, a for-profit dialysis entity, now operates Covenant's dialysis unit. Earlier this year, the firm announced that it would no longer provide linens and pillows to patients during their treatment and informed patients that they would now have to bring their own.

After raising objections to the linens policy and voicing other concerns about quality of care, patients report that they now fear retaliation in the form of termination of services at Covenant, which would result in them having to travel out of town to receive dialysis care.

This vote passed with an overwhelming majority, expressing physicians' lack of confidence in Provena Covenant's administration. The story of this vote was aired by WICD-TV, though no

last November at a community meeting. The vote passed unanimously as community members expressed their dissatisfaction with the way the hospital is being run and joined in calling for the

"It is unconscionable to me that these three nurses were fired after expressing concerns about patient safety. Our community owes them a lot. Very few people will put their jobs and their families on the line that way."

— Urbana City Alderman Milton Otto

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dismissal of Covenant's administrator, Diane Friedman.

CCHCC and community members will continue to press for openness and accountability from Provena Covenant. The hospital's property tax exemption is also up for review, and may be questioned by local authorities in light of recent developments. And, of course, community organizing work will continue.

"We'll be holding more meetings to keep up the pressure," Lennhoff promised. "This is our community hospital."

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affecting low-income Champaign County residents; and many other activities.

In her acceptance speech, Lennhoff emphasized that the problems people face are symptomatic of a larger national problem — the commodification of health care. "When we commodify something that ought to be a basic human right, we are putting a price on people's lives," Lennhoff said. "As a consequence, too many people suffer illness and disability, and too many people's lives end too soon."

Over 50 consumers, community members, leaders, and CCHCC board and staff members participated in a site visit of CCHCC in July, a step in the award recipient selection process which led to the award.

Urbana City Council responds to firings

By BILL MUELLER
CCHCC Organizer

Three Provena Covenant nurses — Faith Henson, Nikki Hurley and Pat Wedig — were fired over the past two years after voicing concerns about hospital conditions and patient safety. Wedig, who had a reputation for being outspoken, was fired from Provena in December 2001 after working several years as a supervisor. Henson was fired after voicing complaints about quality of care and trying to organize union representation for Covenant nurses. Hurley was suspended and later fired after hospital administrators learned that she had talked with a News-Gazette reporter about patient safety issues at the hospital and after she spoke out at CCHCC's first community meeting on Sept. 5.

"I had tried to address the patient safety problems internally and only got threats and abuse for my efforts," Hurley said. "Going public was the only option left. I couldn't stay quiet about what's going on. But of course they fired me. They know they need to keep the rest of their employees scared to death of retaliation. If they don't, the lid will blow off the place."

After Hurley's firing was made public, Urbana City Council members Ruth Wyman and Milton Otto began to develop a municipal Health Care Workers Whistleblowers Protection Act. Wyman introduced the project at CCHCC's second community meeting


and Otto delivered an update at the third meeting. A final version will be ready in spring 2003. "It is unconscionable to me that these three nurses were fired after expressing concerns about patient safety," he said. "Our community owes them a lot. Very few people will put their jobs and their families on the line that way."

You can help show

support for the City of Urbana's efforts by contacting Urbana Mayor Tod Satterthwaite at 384-2456 or 400 S. Vine St., Urbana, with the following message:

"We support the passage of the Health Care Workers' Whistleblower Act and are pleased that the City of Urbana is acting quickly and taking leadership on this issue. Protecting health care workers is important to ensuring patient health and safety."

"Because the City of Urbana is the home of our hospitals and largest health care providers, all of us, regardless of where we live, are invested in making sure that health care workers and patients are protected when they speak out about health and safety issues."

 **Please see the CCHCC report "Is Your Hospital's Nurse Staffing Safe? How You Can Find Out" for more on this issue. All three former Provena nurses contributed to the report, which is available free of charge from CCHCC.**

Medicare 100/Plus Lawsuit Update

By CLAUDIA LENNHOF
Executive Director

Without warning and in violation of its agreement, Provena Covenant ended its participation in the Medicare 100/Plus Programs in Nov. 1998, leaving 1100 low-income local seniors and people with disabilities without a way to afford their hospital-related health care.

Provena refused CCHCC's numerous requests to meet and discuss their decision and their concerns. As a result, in April 1999 CCHCC

filed the first and only lawsuit in its history.

Provena claimed they had no legal or contractual obligations to CCHCC and to the Medicare 100/Plus Programs or its members. In June 2001, CCHCC won an Appellate Court victory in which the Appellate Court unanimously declared that there is indeed an enforceable contract between CCHCC and Provena Covenant for the Medicare 100/Plus Programs.

Provena did not appeal this

court decision and the case was sent back to the local circuit court in order to conclude the lawsuit. Judge DeLaMar, who first heard the case locally, has since retired and the case has not yet been reassigned to another judge. The final aspect of the case will involve an examination of federal Medicare regulations and whether the Medicare 100/Plus Programs were operated in violation of those regulations as Provena

See MEDICARE, pg. 8



By Bill Mueller

On behalf of the Community Health Partnership's Access to Care Working Group, CCHCC is pleased to announce two new resource guides for residents and community organizations in Champaign County. The **Health Care Resource Guide** and the **Behavioral Health Resource Guide** contain a comprehensive listing of resources and programs for affordable health care in the community. Grouped into chapters such as *Options for Affordable Care*, *Advocacy Services* and *Outpatient Treatment/Counseling Services*, the guides give both contact information and eligibility guidelines for each entry. They are a project of the Access to Care Working Group, which has been working for the past two years to address problems of access to health care in Champaign County. Both guides will soon undergo a third printing and will contain updated information on programs and eligibility. Consumers and organizations interested in obtaining a copy of either or both of the guides can call the CCHCC office at 352-6533.

Special thanks go to Liz Mazur, Kelly Righton and Mark Driscoll for their work on this project.

CCHCC urges: "Go Out For Your Kids"

By BRENNER ERFORD

The "Go Out for Your Kids" Campaign is a community education effort to improve children's health by reducing their exposure to indoor tobacco smoke.

Extensive research shows that young children are adversely affected by second-hand smoke. Children's exposure to second-hand smoke increases the risk of lower respiratory tract infections, such as bronchitis and pneumonia. The EPA estimates that between 150,000 and 300,000 of these cases in infants and young children up to 18 months in age each year are attributable to exposure to secondhand smoke. Of these, between 7,500 and 15,000 result in hospitalization.

Secondhand smoke also increases the prevalence of fluid in the middle ear and episodes of asthma. Children who are continually exposed to secondhand smoke miss more days of school.

If you choose to smoke or until you are able to quit, CCHCC and the Consumer

Federation of America recommend actions you can take to help protect the people close to you:

- Choose to smoke outside.
- Choose not to smoke around infants and children.
- Put away all ashtrays.
- Keep your home smoke free.

CCHCC is encouraging parents and other caretakers of children who smoke to take the "Smoke-Free Home Pledge"

and agree not to smoke inside their homes in order to protect their children from the hazards of indoor tobacco smoke. For more information about this health education campaign or to take the Smoke Free Home Pledge, please contact Paulette at 352-6533.

The "Go Out for

Your Kids Campaign" is supported by the Consumer Federation of America in collaboration with the Environmental Protection Agency.

To learn more about the risks posed by secondhand smoke, use one of these free resources:

➡ **"Healthy Indoor Air for America's Homes"**
www.montana.edu/wwwcxair

➡ **The EPA IAQ Infoline**
1-800-438-4318

➡ **Environmental Protection Agency**
www.epa.gov/smokfree

County dental program focuses on kids, oral health

By BILL MUELLER
CCHCC Organizer

In 1996, the Friends of Public Health Coalition, an advocacy group organized by CCHCC, created the Champaign County Public Health Department via a voter referendum. Since then, both FPH and CCHCC have been instrumental in advocating and organizing for the expansion of public health services through the department. One program that has proved exceptionally successful is the department's new Dental Access Program. Under the direction of Coordinator Lisa Bell, the program has enrolled more than 400 children in rural Champaign County in its first ten months of operation. Bell has also recruited nearly 30 private dentists in the county to participate.

The program was created by the Champaign County Board of Health in

Program Information

The County Dental Access Program serves children ages 3 to 18 who live within Champaign County but outside the Champaign-Urbana City limits and whose family income is below 200% of the federal poverty level. Services are free. Call Program Coordinator Lisa Bell at 840-1677.

late 2001, which successfully proposed and passed a public health budget to include the badly needed program.

"Champaign-Urbana kids can go to the Champaign-Urbana Public Health District clinic to see the CUPHD dentist," said FPH Member Jan Thom. "County children haven't had any similar resource."

Bell, a dental hygienist and longtime health advocate, has proved a highly effective program director.

"Most community programs are doing well to recruit two or three dentists during the first year," said CCHCC Executive Director Claudia Lennhoff. "Lisa has about thirty already, and now some dentists are actually calling her, asking if they can participate in the program."

In addition, Bell has worked with schools and children's organizations to screen children for enrollment in the county's program and conduct oral health education. Several community organizations and businesses have held fundraisers or made donations to the program, including the Thomasboro Women's Club, the Women's Business Council, Human Kinetics and the Junior League.

Smile Healthy! radio programming

By CLAUDIA LENNHOF
Executive Director

CCHCC is proud to announce *Smile Healthy!*, a new partnership effort with local radio stations WILL-AM 580 and WBCP-AM 1580 to promote oral health and dental access in Champaign County.

Smile Healthy! is a community collaboration which combines the resources and power of radio with the energy and citizen involvement of grassroots community organizing. Its purpose is to promote oral health education and community efforts to increase access to dental care for all residents of Champaign County. *Smile Healthy!* will help further ongoing community organizing efforts by CCHCC and the Dental

Access Work Group. Radio listeners will learn about oral health, how it affects overall health, the need for community organizing to make affordable or free dental care available and how to get involved in those efforts.

Smile Healthy! radio programming begins in February and continues through July 2003, so stay tuned to WILL-AM and WBCP-AM to learn more. You can also visit the *Smile Healthy!* website at www.smilehealthy.org

for more information. *Smile Healthy!* is underwritten by Sound Partners for Community Health, a program of the Benton Foundation and funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

 **Smile Healthy!
will air on WILL-
FM and WBCP-AM
1580 from February
through July 2003.
For more informa-
tion, visit the Smile
Healthy! website at
www.smilehealthy.org**

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claims. Sadly, the lawsuit will be likely to take many more months before it is concluded.

While Provena continues to fight its obligation to the Medicare 100/Plus members, many members have become more ill, many have died and many have been harassed and even sued by Provena for their medical bills. Some have been forced to file for bankruptcy. Through the four years since the lawsuit was initiated, CCHCC has repeatedly made settlement proposals to Provena in order to try to bring a close to the legal case and relief to the members of the Medicare 100/Plus Programs. Provena has repeatedly ignored or refused these settlement proposals and has never offered a settlement proposal of their own. The lawsuit continues because Provena has left CCHCC and the Medicare 100/Plus members without any other options whatsoever.

CCHCC continues medical debt work

By *BILL MUELLER*
and *CLAUDIA LENNHOF*

In 1999, Ralph Nader called CCHCC's Medical Billing Task Force a "national leader in the field – the first local group to take on this scandal in health care." The MBTF's groundbreaking work continues with its newest project, the Medical Debt Research and Assistance Project. The project is a collaborative effort with national partners from The Access Project and Brandeis University, with generous financial support from the Public Welfare Foundation. It is a national-level project to document and publicize the damage done to people and communities by medical debt in the U.S. CCHCC was selected as one of

three local organizations to partner with Brandeis and The Access Project.

During 2002, CCHCC volunteers, advocates and staff interviewed dozens of local consumers whose lives have been affected by medical debt. A preliminary report entitled "How Medical Debt Affects Champaign County Consumers" was released in July 2002 and a full report will be released both locally and nationally in the next few weeks.

"One of the clear things that has emerged most clearly from the project is that local health care providers' policies and actions are important," said CCHCC Executive Director Claudia Lennhoff. "While the national

scene is important, our community clinics and hospitals make decisions every day that affect our residents for good or ill."

Many consumers whose income would actually be exempt from collections are being sued for payment of medical bills. To address this crisis, CCHCC has developed pamphlets with information on legal protections for

low-income consumers who are being sued for medical debt. The pamphlets, developed by CCHCC Advocate Greg Beck, list types of protected income and assets and how those protections can be claimed in court. Protected income sources include Social Security, worker's

compensation benefits and most pensions as well as weekly take-home pay under \$231.75.

"Very few people know that these protections exist," Beck said, "and the sad fact is that you have to claim them in court in order to benefit from them. So, I hope these pamphlets help people get the protection to which they're legally entitled."

MBTF members have distributed the pamphlets outside the Champaign County Courthouse. "People really want the pamphlets," said CCHCC organizer Brooke Anderson. "Not only that, a lot of lawyers stop to praise us, telling us that something like this has been needed for a long time."

Medical Debt Amnesty

By *BROOKE ANDERSON*
CCHCC Organizer

Through the work of the Medical Debt Research and Assistance Project, CCHCC learned how rising medical expenses and health care providers' aggressive collection practices are driving more and more people in our community into financial devastation. While anyone can incur medical debt, it most adversely affects individuals and families who are already struggling to make ends meet. Ruthless collection practices are unacceptable in any circumstance, but they are particularly unethical when used against individuals and families known to be in crisis, homeless, or using other emergency services.

CCHCC surveyed local social service agencies and found that not only is medical debt a major barrier to their clients' health care access, housing access, good credit and transportation, but also places a burden on the agencies as well since debt often delays their clients' abilities to achieve self-sufficiency.

To address this problem, CCHCC has hosted several meetings for social service providers to discuss the creation of a "medical debt amnesty program," which would cancel, reduce or postpone collection of medical debt for people using emergency services in Champaign County. This project is still in development, so please look for future updates.

**Are you being sued
for medical debt?**

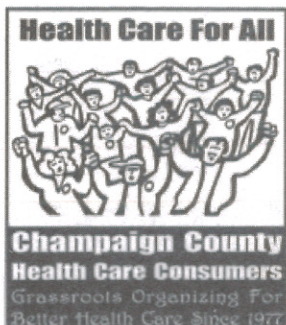
KNOW YOUR RIGHTS!

**Call CCHCC's Hotline
at 352-6533**

Show your support!

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Front



Back

"Power concedes nothing without a demand."

**Frederick Douglass
Abolitionist**

☐ I would like to order a CCHCC t-shirt!

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Please order me t-shirts in the following colors/sizes:

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1. Size _____ Color _____ Cost: \$ _____

1. Size _____ Color _____ Cost: \$ _____

A CCHCC staff member will contact you soon to arrange a time for you to pick up your t-shirts. Total: \$ _____



Many thanks to those who helped us out!

CCHCC would like to thank all those who supported the CCHCC Dinner Ad Book, Phone-a-Thon and Raffle

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Bundy Business Machines
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The Great Impasta
The Pavilion
University of Illinois Sport Division
UIUC Office of Women's Programs
UNITE
Union for Professional Employees
Upsie Daisy
Urbana Human Relations
Walnut Street Tea Co.
Women's Direct Action Collective
WEFT 90.1 FM
Weiskamp Screen Printing
Yen Ching North
Yoga Institute of Champaign-Urbana
Vietnam Veterans Against the War

From ADVOCATE, pg. 3

with payment based on a sliding fee scale. There are three discount levels through DRP: 20 percent, 40 percent or 60 percent off the dentist's usual charges. Patients *must* make payment for their initial appointment in cash. Payment for additional work is expected on the day of service, unless the patient and the dentist agree to some alternative plan.

Before the appointment, the DRP Coordinator will mail an Appointment Reminder Card to the client. We find this helps avoid the problem of missed appointments. However, if an appointment is missed, the client must contact the DRP Coordinator to be returned to our waiting list. If a second appointment is missed, the person will be dropped from the DRP permanently.

The program is designed to help people into the dental care system so they can be treated and given instruction on dental hygiene. The program is easy to join. Simply call 352-6533 and ask about the Dental Referral Program.

Are your health care bills piling up?

the hotline can help.
352-6533

From VICTORY, back page

UIUC employees.

However, the EOCP is not equivalent to contraceptive coverage through employee health insurance plans and does not meet the EEOC's provisions. The EOCP only provides the Ortho brand of oral contraceptives. The new service is also limited to UIUC employees, excluding dependents who are covered under insurance.

Therefore, the WHTF is still insisting that the employee health insurance plans include full contraceptive coverage. The UIUC administration can provide the leadership and muscle to make this coverage a reality since the University enrolls thousands of employees in these health insurance plans and therefore has tremendous power to require that providers offer contraceptive coverage. We just need to encourage UIUC to use this

leverage to advocate for the rights of its employees.

It is only going to be a matter of time before contraceptive coverage is established for UIUC employees, but CCHCC needs everyone's help to make it happen! Contact Brooke Anderson at CCHCC if you are interested in signing a postcard to the Chancellor, joining our mailing list, or otherwise getting involved: (217) 352-6533 or brooke@shout.net.

CCHCC depends on you!

In 1977, a handful of Champaign County residents concerned about the lack of citizen representation in the local health planning agency, formed the Champaign County Health Care Consumers. Twenty-six years later, CCHCC is still fighting for consumer empowerment and quality, affordable health care for all.

How has CCHCC stayed strong? By remaining faithful to and grounded in our community, our members and our supporters. We strive to make concrete changes for the better in people's day-to-day lives.

We've piled up a lot of victories, a lot of fun and friends and a lot of great stories in a quarter century. People from other communities often tell us how lucky Champaign County residents are to have an organization like CCHCC. We agree, but we always make sure to tell them that CCHCC is Champaign County residents. It is the work and the caring of people who believe in health care justice and in the tradition of grassroots democracy.

You can help sustain the work and the tradition of CCHCC, ensuring that we continue to play a vital role in seeking fairness and justice in Champaign County. Your donation can be a one-time contribution, a quarterly or monthly pledge, a tax-

exempt bequest or a trust distribution. Here is an easy sample of how to remember CCHCC:

I give, devise, and bequeath to Champaign County Health Care Consumers (CCHCC) of Champaign, Illinois, a community nonprofit organization, the sum of _____ Dollars (\$ _____) or _____ (percent) of my estate, to be used to carry out the mission of CCHCC.

Contributions may also be made on a quarterly or monthly basis. Call (217) 352-6533 if you have questions or need more information.

Thanks to all who volunteered at CCHCC's 2002 Phone-a-thon!

Mark Aber	Keri Kles
Gary Adelman	Sang Lee
Patricia Avery	Ailsa Mackerras
Lian Alan	Miriam Marx
LaToya Artis	Jamila McClinton
Brandi Barnes	Molly McGlone
Lisa Bell	Janna McGregor
Karen Bojda	Jesse Melton
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Robbie Graham	Jennifer Powers
Mahogany Griggs	Milena Rumak
Danielle Hargis	Marya Ryan
Nicole Hurley	Elizabeth Scholebo
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Inga Karliner	Ruth Wyman
Kimberly Kentfield	

CCHCC Membership Renewal Form

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

(Please clip and return with your check)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Patron (\$120) | <input type="checkbox"/> Individual Membership (\$25) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sponsor (\$60) | <input type="checkbox"/> Fixed-Income Discount (\$20) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family Membership (\$40) | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: \$ _____ |

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ ZIP _____ Phone _____

Contributions to CCHCC are tax-deductible

Want to make a difference – *locally?*

Volunteer participation is essential to carry out every aspect of the CCHCC mission. If you would like to contribute your time, energy, ideas and skills to CCHCC, please call 352-6533.

UIUC employees score contraceptive victory

By BROOKE ANDERSON
CCHCC Organizer

CCHCC and a coalition of labor, health care and women's organizations recently won a huge victory for employees at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Thanks to CCHCC and the Women's Health Task Force, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign employees now have access to free oral contraceptives.

In 2001, CCHCC brought together area organizations to form a Women's Health Task Force (WHTF) to fight for contraceptive coverage for women in our community. The impetus for the Task Force came from a call to our Hotline from UI employee, Jenni Mueller, who discovered that the oral contraceptives prescribed to treat her endometriosis were not covered by her UI employee insurance plan. Working with hotline advocates, she eventually got her pills covered for "medical necessity."

"But I didn't want other women to

have to go through what I went through to get my pills covered, so I worked with CCHCC and other area organizations to form the Women's Health Task Force. Together, we're fighting for the rights of all UI employees to have access to contraceptive coverage," said Mueller.

The exclusion of contraceptives from insurance plans costs many women employees (and spouses of male employees) \$300-500 per year in out-of-pocket health expenses. These costs are a financial hardship and a major barrier to contraceptive access for women. To categorically refuse to cover contraception when it is central to women's health is discrimination. Employers, not just insurance providers, have a responsibility to provide coverage that meets the needs of their employees. In fact, the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission recently declared that it is a violation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 for an employer to exclude contraceptives from its prescription coverage. This

EEOC decision has inspired several women to sue their employers and so far state courts have upheld employees' rights.

Bolstered by the success of these efforts, in November 2001 the WHTF launched a campaign for contraceptive coverage at UIUC. Hundreds of employees contacted the University Chancellor with their support of contraceptive coverage, dozens of organizations signed on in support of the coverage and the campaign received major media coverage.

As a result of our organizing, the WHTF was granted a meeting with the Chancellor at which she announced the plan to create an Employee Oral Contraceptive Program through which UIUC employees could receive free oral contraceptives at McKinley Health Center. The announcement was a huge victory for employees! The new service is a great first step by the University and has already benefited hundreds of

See VICTORY, pg. 11

Champaign County Health Care Consumers

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