



# Physician Advocate

The Harris County Medical Society serves as an advocate for physicians in Harris County.

Physician Advocate is produced quarterly to provide recent highlights of HCMS advocacy on behalf of members and their patients.

Since August 2004, the **Strategic Planning Committee**, chaired by HAM President **Dr. Diana L. Fite**, and the various HCMS boards and committees have reviewed and prioritized objectives and strategies for the 2005 Harris County Medical Society/Houston Academy of Medicine Strategic Plan, which is near completion.

**Texas Comptroller Carole Keeton Strayhorn** met with **Drs. Betty Jo Edwards, Robert C. Vanzant, Diana L. Fite, Spencer R. Berthelsen, L. Maximilian Buja, Russell W.H. Kridel**, and HCMS staff Nov. 11 to hear medicine's agenda for the 2005 Texas Legislative Session. Comptroller Strayhorn indicated her support for change to excluding physicians from the comprehensive business tax increases and funding the Medicaid/Children's Health Insurance Program through a cigarette tax.

Chair of the Board of the Greater Houston Partnership (GHP) **Rob Mosbacher** met with HCMS President **Dr. Donald R. Butts** and **Drs. Robert C. Vanzant, Spencer R. Berthelsen, Philip A. Matorin** and HCMS staff Nov. 17. The physicians and Mosbacher discussed the GHP's Public Health Task Force report that included recommendations for dealing with major problems with our local system of health care and developing some viable solutions.

The Board of Medical Legislation, chaired by **Dr. Steven M. Petak**, and the Board on Socioeconomics, chaired by **Dr. Philip A. Matorin**, held a combined meeting Dec. 2 to review issues that will confront physicians in

the 2005 Texas Legislative Session. The combined boards also discussed development of policy principles on local health system reform activities.

**Texas Medical Liability Trust has reduced its physician medical liability premiums by 17 percent**, representing \$34 million in savings to Texas doctors. The savings are a result of the Texas Medical Association's (TMA) efforts in the area of medical liability reforms and the passage of Proposition 12, which caps awards on non-economic damages in medical liability cases.

At the TMA Summit in October, **the House of Delegates** adopted guiding principles for TMA's 2005 legislative agenda on sunset review of the Texas State Board of Medical Examiner's, Texas Workers' Compensation Commission, Medicaid transformation, expert medical testimony in liability cases, taxes, graduate medical education, and the obesity epidemic.

TMA General Counsel Rocky Wilcox and attorneys from the other medical societies across the nation are meeting monthly to hear updates regarding **Aetna's and CIGNA's compliance** with their out-of-court settlements in the anti-racketeering class-action lawsuit brought by the medical groups against the carriers. TMA is monitoring both companies to make sure they comply with the judgments and to assist physicians in understanding their options for obtaining damage claims, as a result of the suit. A foundation that was established as part of the settlement will use a major grant to pro-

vide physicians with education and equipment to help with management of their practices. For updates, see the HCMS Web site at [www.hcms.org](http://www.hcms.org), scroll down to CIGNA RICO settlement.

**Drs. Lewis E. Foxhall, Elizabeth Torres, Philip A. Matorin**, and HCMS staff met with representatives of managed care companies to express the concerns of HCMS on establishing criteria for developing networks based on economic credentialing and to resolve payment issues and discuss policy changes.



HCMS physicians partnered with Houston Bar Association attorneys Oct. 21 to inform approximately **800 fifth-grade students about the medical and legal consequences of using drugs, alcohol and tobacco** through the HCMS IDEA Program, chaired by **Dr. Mary W. Geda**.

Medserv, the wholly own subsidiary of HCMS, conducted its free, **semi-annual Business Expo** for physicians and their staff members and spouses on Oct. 9 at the Renaissance Hotel. Physicians visited with exhibitors on the latest products and servic-

es to enhance their medical practices and attended three CME courses on managed care contracts, medical liability and asset protection.

HCMS worked with the Harris County Public Health Executive Director **Dr. Herminia Palacio**, City of Houston Director of EMS **Dr. David E. Persse**, and academia to notify physicians about the flu vaccine shortage and CDC's designated high-risk groups. The HCMS distributed e-mails and faxes through the HCMS Physician Alert System to more than 6,000 physicians to help city and county officials identify supply and demand for the vaccine. **Dr. Robert Vanzant** participated in a news conference with the city and county.



As a part of the HCMS Mini-Internship program, chaired by **Dr. John R. Potts III**, five community leaders followed physicians for two days, spending half days with four different doctors Oct. 27-28. The interns were Leah Rummel, executive director at Texas Association of Health Plans; Pati

McCandless, legislative affairs director and special counsel at Unicare; Anne Culver, senior vice president of government relations at Greater Houston Partnership; Elaine Barber, senior vice president of regional issues at Greater Houston Partnership; and Mary Ann Azevedo, health/medical reporter at *Houston Business Journal*.

HCMS continues to host meeting of the area **blood collection groups to address ways to increase the local blood supply**. Blood collections are 10 percent ahead of last year.



**TMA billing and collections expert, Pat Coffey**, assisted 26 physicians' practices in the free 30-minute consultations at the HCMS offices Oct. 19-22.

Through the HCMS Website and *The Harris County Physician Newsletter*, HCMS continued to provide valuable information and resources to physicians and their office staff.

TMA held seminars on "Legal, Ethical and Risk Management Consideration," "Show Me the Money; Practical Solutions for Reimbursement," "Workers' Compensation Obstacle Course," and "The Texas Primary Care Coalition Electronic Health Record Conference."

On Nov. 4-5, **TMA hosted a grassroots training session** for approximately 75 physicians, alliance members, and medical students.

To date, the HCMS Hassle Factor Log and regular contact with the managed care companies **resulted in the collection of over \$9 million** owed to HCMS physicians, which can be accounted for, plus millions of dollars as a result of policy changes.

HCMS continued to hold geographically convenient meetings through the six HCMS branch societies.



Dec. 6, HCMS Alliance held its annual Touch, Smell and Hear event at the John P. McGovern Museum of Health & Medical Science building. More than 200 children with mental and physical challenges experienced the holidays through their senses. KUHF-FM 88.7 (NPR), KPRC-TV (NBC), KHOU-TV (CBS), KXLN (Univision-Spanish), *Texas Medical Center News*, and *Houston Chronicle* reported on the event.