



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.

On Aug. 21, the leaders of the Harris County Medical Society and the Houston Academy of Medicine convened for an all-day strategic planning retreat to provide direction in planning future advocacy and services to our members.

At the Texas Medical Association annual meeting, the House of Delegates passed HCMS-sponsored resolutions opposing all forms of economic profiling schemes that do not accurately assess quality cost-effective health care and asked that TMA convene a high-level working group with the Texas Hospital Association for the purpose of documenting the increasing demand on hospital emergency departments for uncompensated care.

Houston Business Journal published an article on the front page of its April 30-May 6 issue, entitled "New health plans alarm physicians: Network credentialing systems create controversy by screening out doctors." HCMS member Dr. Bruce Christopherson, HCMS Board on Socioeconomics Chair Dr. Philip Matorin, and TMA President Dr. Charles W. Bailey Jr. were interviewed.

At the American Medical Association annual meeting, delegates adopted two TMA proposals. One proposal called for a feasibility study of a nationally standardized coding and bundling bill system. A second called for the elimination of outdated caps on the number of funded Medicare graduate medical education (GME) training slots, leveling the playing field for Texas teaching hospitals affected by geographically inequitable Medicare GME funding and stabilizing Medicare GME and Medicaid disproportionate share hospital funding.

Since the passage of HCMS/TMA-supported Proposition 12, medical liability lawsuits have dropped to an average of 13.6 cases per month, nearly two-thirds fewer than the monthly rate from 1996 through 2002 in Harris County.

TMA called for liability insurance rate roll-back and praised the Texas Department of Insurance for rejecting rate increase requests from other carriers.

CIGNA and Aetna have agreed to out-of-court settlements in the lawsuit filed by TMA and other medical associations for violation of federal antiracketeering laws. In addition to monetary settlements, both defendants have agreed to, and will be held accountable for, changes in the way they do business in the future.



On June 19, HCMS physicians volunteered to give physicals to more than 70 inner-city Boy Scouts who wanted to attend scout camp but lacked the resources for the physicals.

Physician volunteers were: Drs. John W. Cassidy, Stephen W. Cotlar, Carlos R. Hamilton Jr., Paul S. Herman, Armando J. Jarquin, Aaron M. Levine, David M. Litowsky, John Lu, Shelley Sekula-Gibbs, Rafael Verduzco, and Kevin S. Winfield.

HCMS President Dr. Donald Butts protested the Texas Department of Health (TDH) drafted rules governing the disbursement of funds to designated trauma centers for uncompensated trauma care. He argued that physicians should be included in the compensation. TDH rejected requests from

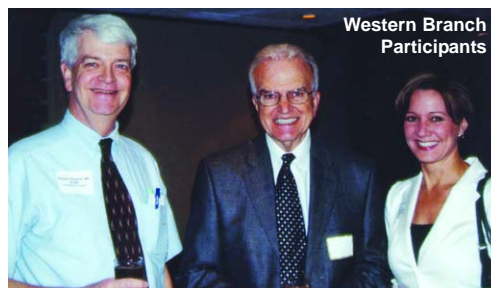
HCMS and TMA to require a hospital to have a physician plan if it wants to participate in the new funding. It is hoped that this will be addressed in the 2005 legislative session. In the meantime, all physicians who provide trauma services should monitor how their hospitals implement the new rules.

In the Aug. 15 issue of the *Harris County Physicians Newsletter*, HCMS printed the "verification for guarantee of payment" form to help physicians and their staffs document the necessary information as dictated by SB 418 and the TDI Prompt Pay Rule.

Approximately 65 HCMS physicians and/or their office staffs took advantage of HCMS/TMA-sponsored free private 30-minute reimbursement consultations to help with reimbursement issues, slow paying carriers, collection problem, bundling, coding, Medicare, and Medicaid.

In addition to holding mini medical schools during the summer months, the John P. McGovern Museum of Health & Medical Science hosted the traveling exhibit, *Microbes: Invisible Invaders, Amazing Allies*.

The Harris County Medical Society Branches held spring meetings on the Business of Medicine, Asset Protection, and Future of Your Medical License for ethics CME credit and discounts for TMLT-insured.



Approximately 500 physicians and staff attended the HIPAA seminar hosted by HCMS, TMA, Gulf Coast Medical Group Management Association, and Texas Association of Health Plans on June 10.

HCMS participated in the Greater Houston Partnership's (GHP) Public Health Task Force Services Sub-Group that studied the services rendered through the Houston/Harris County public health and health care safety net. The sub-group's July 30 report included recommendations that will be forwarded to the GHP Public Health Task Force.

More than 380 physicians, their staff members and spouses attended the HCMS Business Expo on Saturday, April 24, at the Renaissance Hotel. Physicians visited with more than 70 exhibitors on the latest products and services to enhance their medical practices.

Approximately 60 HCMS physicians under age 40 and/or have practiced medicine five years or less, attended the HCMS Council of Young Physicians meeting June 15 on "Don't Make Me Sue You." The program provided one hour of ethics CME credit.

At the May 21 Francis C. Moore, MD, Medical Journalism Awards luncheon, HCMS and HAM honored 11 media reporters for their dedication in delivering accurate and timely medical information to the public.

The American Medical Association awarded the HCMS Interprofessional Drug and Education Alliance (IDEA) program with the "Fund for Better Health Grant" of \$1,000 to purchase visual aids for the program.

On April 1, 13 teams of HCMS physicians and Houston Bar Association attorneys visited local schools to inform approximately 700 fifth-grade students about the medical and legal consequences of illegal drugs, alcohol and tobacco through the IDEA Program, chaired by Dr. Mary Geda.



On Aug. 24, HCMS held the 2004 HCMS First-Year Medical Students' Mixer for students at Baylor College of Medicine and The University of Texas Medical School at Houston.

The five local blood collecting organizations continued to meet this spring at HCMS to discuss their "Commit for Life" marketing strategy to permanently increase the blood supply in the Gulf Coast region. HCMS continues to collect monthly usage and collection data from the organizations.

HCMS sent information to the *Houston Business Journal*, which published an article on the front page April 8 on PCCM. Drs. Philip Matorin, chair of the Board on Socioeconomics, and HCMS

member Dr. Edith Irby Jones and HCMS President Dr. Donald Butts were quoted in the article.

In late July, the HCMS Board of Medical Legislation met with Mike Hachtman, chair of the Texas Workers' Compensation Commission, to explore cost effective reforms that could be incorporated into the program during its sunset review in the 2005 Texas Legislature.

HCMS partnered with the Houston Medical Forum and the Hispanic AMA of Houston to oppose Health and Human Services Commissioner Hawkins' decision to discontinue the Medicaid Primary Care Case Management Model (PCCM), also known as the Texas Health Network, leaving only an HMO option for Medicaid patients. HCMS has written letters and held meetings with Texas legislators, requesting their support in reversing the Commissioner's decision.

HCMS and TMA recruited more than 120 University of Texas Medical School at Houston and 109 Baylor College of Medicine first-year medical students to become members. TMA Immediate Past President Dr. Charles W. Bailey Jr. spoke at the Baylor orientation.

