



PhysicianAdvocate

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 member physicians and their patients.

Hurricane Ike Recovery — HCMS assisted the Catastrophic Medical Operations Center to determine how many physicians' offices and dialysis centers were open after Hurricane Ike. Since hospitals received priority in electricity restoration, most physicians' offices near hospitals were restored within a few days after the storm. HCMS posted information on the HCMS Web site, which included a place for physicians to post open office space to assist those who lost their offices due to Ike. HCMS distributed a blast fax to physicians to announce that TMA Physicians' Benevolent Fund will have available Ike grant funds for physicians.

HCMS Council of Hospital Chiefs of Staff — The Council of Hospital Chiefs of Staff met on Sept. 24. **Chairman Dr. Steven D. Brown** held a discussion of Hurricane Ike ride-out and recovery processes. A summary is being developed to share with all hospitals and emergency preparedness officials.

UnitedHealthcare meets with HCMS — HCMS leaders have been meeting with Houston's big six health insurance companies as a result of the HCMS Payor Survey. On July 22, HCMS leaders met with the national and local executives and medical directors of UnitedHealthcare. The focus of the meeting was on decreasing physician administrative burdens as well as promoting and properly compensating the medical home.

TMA & HCMS Meet United at Headquarters — Representatives from TMA and HCMS met with the president of UnitedHealth Networks, vice president of networks in the southwest region, and other United executives to discuss issues physicians are having with UnitedHealthcare.

TMB Town Hall Meeting — The Texas

Medical Board held a town hall meeting on July 15 at The University of Texas Medical School at Houston.

Healthcare Alliance Discusses Uninsured — **HCMS President Elect Dr. Lewis E. Foxhall** presided over the quarterly meeting of the Harris County Healthcare Alliance. At the meeting, the Alliance members discussed a study on how to make Harris County's Federally Qualified Health Clinics (FQHCs) capable of handling more of the primary care needs of our large uninsured population. FQHC funding is based upon the number of Medicaid patients treated. Because Texas Medicaid covers so few patients, Harris County's FQHC Medicaid patient volume is less than half of the national average. The report offered short-term and long-term solutions, emphasizing collaboration among FQHCs and other health care institutions.

TMB Clears Up License Backlog — HCMS and TMA told the Texas Legislature last year the Texas Medical Board (TMB) needed more staff and technology to process a huge backlog of licenses from physicians who want to practice in Texas. Lawmakers agreed. In June, only 33 applications awaited screening, and the oldest was only 14 days old.

Discussing Medicare with Rep. Culberson — Since Congress overturned President George Bush's veto of the bill reversing the 10.6-percent cut in physicians' Medicare payments, HCMS and TMA have returned to discussing TMA's Texas Medicare Manifesto. The Manifesto asks Congress to enact a rational physician payment system that automatically keeps up with the cost of running a practice and is backed by a stable funding source. On Aug. 13, HCMS and TMA staff and **Dr. W. H. Russell Kridel** met with Congressman John Culberson to discuss Medicare.

HCMS New Member & Young Physician Meeting — On Aug. 12, more than 100 physicians attended the HCMS Fourth Annual New Member and Young Physician Meeting at The John P. McGovern Museum of Health & Medical Science. The family event included food and drinks for adults and children. Children were given supervised events so physicians could network, meet sponsors and attend the one-hour ethics CME seminar. The event was co-chaired by **HCMS Council of Young Physicians Chair Dr. David M. Anmuth** and **HCMS Membership Committee Chair Dr. Madhureeta Achari**.

Community Leaders Spend Day With Physicians — During the HCMS Mini Internship Program on July 30, four community leaders who affect health care spent a day (one-on-one) with physicians so they could understand the challenges physicians face. The community leaders were exposed to the clinical as well as administrative side of the practices. This year's interns were: State Rep. Allen Fletcher; Elaine Britt, director of human resources at Rice University; Jay Donnell, director of Frank Crystal & Company (insurance consultant); and Cindy George, *Houston Chronicle* health/medical reporter. The physicians who hosted interns were: **Chair Dr. Rick Q. Ngo, Dr. John R. Potts III, Dr. Yvonne I. Chu, Dr. Bradford S. Patt, Dr. Judi Shaw-Rice, Dr. K Suresh Reddy, Dr. Mina K. Sinacori, Dr. Brent R. King, Dr. Antonio Muniz, Dr. Arlo F. Weltge, and Dr. Shkelzen Hoxhaj**.

Three-Share Programs — The Harris County Healthcare Alliance (Alliance), chaired by **Dr. Lewis E. Foxhall**, received a \$1.3 million grant to assist in administering three-share health insurance programs for five coalitions throughout the state: Houston, Galveston, Central Texas, Dallas, Fort Worth, and El Paso. Three-share pro-

grams provide insurance for the working poor with the employer, employee and government charities sharing the premium costs. Galveston has begun enrolling members. Houston and Central Texas will begin in early 2009. HCMS staff serves on the Oversight Committee for the three-share grant.

HCMS Ad Hoc Business Community Committee — The Committee, chaired by **Dr. Bernard M. Gerber**, met on Aug. 25 with board members of the Houston Business Group on Health. The group agreed to work with the HCMS Committee on standardization of health insurance processes to diminish administrative hassles, quality and improvement programs and transparency in the health care system. TMA staff also attended to garner support for TMA's legislative agenda, which calls for transparency and accountability from health insurance companies.

Candidate Briefings — HCMS and TMA staff met with legislative officials to educate them on many health care issues, such as Medicare and physician ownership. On July 30, physicians and HCMS staff met with State Rep. Allen Fletcher. On Aug. 13, physicians and staff from HCMS and TMA met with Congressman John Culberson. On Aug. 18, physicians and HCMS staff met with Congressman Nick Lampson. On Aug. 19, physicians and HCMS staff met with state Sen. Mike Jackson. On Aug. 20, physicians and HCMS staff met with Michael Skelly, a candidate for Congress. On Aug. 26, the surgical, orthopedic and plastic surgery specialty societies met with Congressman Nick Lampson.

HCMS Offers New Benefit — HCMS now offers Practice Listings, a patient referral tool, which can be placed in the *2009 HCMS/HAM Pictorial Roster*. Here you can let your professional colleagues know more about your practice - office locations, languages spoken, procedures performed, etc.

Blue Cross Abandons Economic Rating — At TMA's urging, Blue Cross abandoned its economic rating system of physicians.

Blue Cross Out-of-Network — HCMS wrote a letter to Blue Cross, as an employer who has Blue Cross, requesting clarification

of its policy on out-of-network physicians. HCMS had heard that Blue Cross is paying out-of-network physicians a very low amount, making them collect the balance from patients. Blue Cross has not communicated its policy to HCMS. Meanwhile, Blue Cross has entered into a Consent Order with the Texas Department of Insurance alleging it paid unreasonably low out-of-network payments to facilities. Blue Cross has denied wrong doing but has agreed to pay a fine of \$250,000 and reimburse employees/patients at \$3.9 million.

RPO Reception — The HCMS Retired Physician Organization, chaired by **Dr. Shelly E. Liss**, held its 14th annual open house to recruit new members on Sept. 9.

TMLT Cuts Rates Again — Texas physicians continue to reap the benefits of the state's 2003 medical liability reform, which HCMS, TMA and other county medical societies worked hard to gain and preserve. The Texas Medical Liability Trust (TMLT) Board of Governors has approved an average 4.7-percent cut in liability insurance rates for its policyholders and a 22.5-percent dividend for physicians renewing their policies.

Meetings with Media — On July 29, HCMS and TMA communications staff visited with media to discuss Medicare, transparency, insurance issues, medical home, physician ownership, and other medical issues. The media visited were: KRIV-TV (Fox), *Houston Chronicle's* health/medical reporters Lynn Cook and Todd Ackermann and the *Houston Press*.

Branch Meetings — The Branch societies held meetings for one hour ethics CMEs. On Sept. 25, Central Branch, chaired by Central Branch President **Dr. Robert M. Komorn**, held its meeting at Trevisio on Physician Stress & Burnout. On Sept. 30, East Branch, chaired by **Dr. Mary F. Hewitt**, held its meeting in Baytown on *So You Received a Letter from the TMB: What Do You Do Now?*

Medical School Mixer — More than 250 medical students from The University of Texas Medical School at Houston and Baylor College of Medicine mixed and mingled at the annual HCMS First Year

Medical School Students' Mixer on Aug. 29, held on the lawn of the Houston Academy of Medicine-Texas Medical Center Library. **HCMS President Dr. Tom Garcia** welcomed the students into their first-year of school and invited them to be a part of HCMS and organized medicine.

HCMS Scheduled Free Payment Consults — HCMS scheduled private 30-minute free reimbursement consults with TMA reimbursement experts for physicians' practices on Oct. 14-16. The consults assist physicians with coding issues, late or slow paying issues, etc.

HCMS Payment Advocacy Program — The HCMS Payment Advocacy Program is responsible for collecting more than \$14 million in physician reimbursements since 2000.

Media Coverage — Post Ike Coverage: On Sept. 19, HCMS distributed post-Ike information, including information on health resources to local media. On Sept. 22, HCMS scheduled interview with KHOU-TV CBS **Dr. Bruce C. Kennedy** to discuss physicians who no longer had offices due to Ike. On Oct. 1, HCMS printed President's Page on post-Ike information. On Oct. 1, HCMS distributed post-Ike information to the Greater Houston Partnership for publication. Medical Home: On Sept. 4, HCMS provided statistics and information to KHOU-TV (CBS) on the number of internists over the past 10 years and the importance of a Medical Home. **Dr. Tom Garcia** was interviewed. Miscellaneous: On Sept. 4, HCMS provided background information from **Dr. Michael E. Speer** and scheduled interview with **Dr. Max R. Mintz** to talk with KHOU-TV Channel 11 on circumcision guidelines. On Sept. 3, Okalahoma Medical Association used two articles from the Sept. 1 *Harris County Physician Newsletter* for its publication. On Aug. 28, HCMS provided information on HCMS Retired Physician Organization and UT Nursing School for *UT's Caring Minds Magazine*. On Oct. 1, HCMS distributed e-newsletter to all local media, highlighting Ike, medical liability and rates. Aug. 1, HCMS assisted KHOU-TV on providing information on laboratories. On Aug. 27, HCMS provided information to *Houston Business Journal* on vein clinics.