

NEWS BRIEFS

Informational Newsletter for Wyoming Hospitals

WHA Calendar:

- WHA Region 2 Meeting
Riverton 1/18
- WHA Region 4 Meeting
Rock Springs 1/19
- WHA Region 3 Meeting
Torrington 1/22
- Wyoming Legislature Convenes 2/8

Other Events:

- Quality Health-care Foundation
Casper 1/27-1/28
- NRHA Rural Health Policy Institute
Washington, DC 1/25-1/27

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AHA Sponsors National Call-In Day on Health Reform

A finale to the year-long debate on healthcare reform may be as little as a month away, as Congressional leaders push for a vote before the President's State of the Union address.

Because of that target of the opportunity to claim victory on healthcare reform during a major national speech of the date of the State of the Union is not yet clear. And that means it is unclear how much time remains to improve the final bill.

To help members reach out to their Congressional delegations in what appear to be the waning weeks of the debate, the AHA is hosting a "Hospital National Call-In Day for Health Reform" on Wednesday, Jan. 20.

On that day, the AHA is encouraging members to call their legislators and share their concerns on the pending legislation.

The AHA recently sent Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, D-CA, and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-NV, a 27-page letter outlining hospitals' major concerns with the House and Senate versions of the bill, as well as suggestions for improving the final bill.

Congressional leaders are currently working on a compromise bill that will ultimately

be sent back to both the House and Senate for approval. Both chambers must approve identical versions of the bill before it is sent to the President for his signature.

Although both the House and Senate bills expand coverage, the House bill expands coverage to 96 percent of those legally residing in the United States. The Senate bill did not reach the coverage threshold that was part of an agreement reached last year between the AHA, the White House, and Sen. Max Baucus, D-MT, in which hospitals agreed to forego \$500 billion in Medicare payments.



Further, the AHA letter supported the House versions of individual and employer mandates, as well as the House's earlier implementation dates for insurance reforms.

On the other hand, the AHA letter supported the Senate's approach to the creation of a public option. The Senate proposes state-based, non-public, non-governmental healthcare co-

operatives, and non-public, multi-state health plans. These alternatives offer needed reforms while preserving market-based approaches with negotiated provider rates.

With respect to Medicaid, the AHA letter favored the House approach to Medicaid expansion, while supporting the Senate's method for funding that expansion.

The Senate bill would expand Medicaid eligibility to those at or below 133 percent of the federal poverty level. The House bill, however, would provide 100 percent federal funding to all states to cover the expanded Medicaid populations through 2019.

Among other issues, the AHA also urged conferees to limit penalties for readmissions only to avoidable readmissions. Both the House and Senate have proposed similar policies that would impose financial penalties for "excess" readmissions when compared to "expected" levels of readmissions.

The AHA will issue an Advocacy Alert with a toll-free telephone number to connect with legislators' offices during the calling campaign later this week. The Wyoming Hospital Association will also keep members apprised of the campaign details and call information.



Don't forget to send us a story about your hospital so we can feature you in our Member Spotlight section!

South Big Horn Addition Becomes Reality

It has taken three long years from concept to completion, but the new addition at South Big Horn Hospital (SBHH) in Basin is now a reality, and the community celebrated that achievement at an open house in December.

The new addition houses a General Electric computer-aided tomography (CT) machine ó a piece of equipment that cost about \$500,000.

With the new equipment, radiology staff at SBHH will be able to take full-body

scans and produce 3D images that provide an improved level of diagnostic specificity, such as how far a break goes into a bone.

The State Loan and Investment Board approved \$1.8 million in grant funding for the project in November 2006. SBHH provided a 25 percent local match totaling \$658,500.

Remaining funding came from an optional three-mill levy, which was approved by 70 percent of the voters in the 2006 election. The

mill levy generates about \$220,000 annually.

After securing funding, SBHH CEO Jackie Claudson and members of the board worked through the survey process, adjusting as necessary, to get plans approved and inspections completed, and to finalize the project.

The SBHH addition opened to a ribbon cutting and community celebration on Dec. 7.

WCAHN Begins Planning for Next Flex Grant Request

Members of the Wyoming Critical Access Hospital Network (WCAHN) met in Cheyenne last week to establish priorities for the next federal Flex grant application.

The Medicare Rural Hospital Flexibility Program provides funding for critical access hospitals and their networks to collaborate and provide services that meet the small hospitals' unique needs.

Through a partnership with the state Office of Ru-

ral Health, the Wyoming Hospital Association manages a portion of the grant, which has funded such projects as the WHA Nurse Leadership Training Program, in-state workshops on maximizing Medicare reimbursement, and out-of-state training at national conferences.

The WCAHN Flex planning meeting was facilitated by Rural Health Solutions, a firm engaged by the Office of Rural Health to guide the planning process and ensure

that Wyoming's plan aligns with federal guidelines for participation in the Flex program.

Members of the WCAHN reviewed goals related to each aspect of the Flex program, including emergency medical services concerns, CAH performance and financial improvement, health information technology, and quality improvement.

Wyoming currently has 15 critical access hospitals.



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Nurse-For-A-Day Volunteers Needed for Legislative Session

The Wyoming Hospital Association is accepting volunteers for its annual Nurse-For-A-Day Program during the 2010 Budget Session of the legislature.

Volunteers are stationed in the Medical Aid Station on the third floor of the State Capitol building in Cheyenne during the session.

Typically, they handle routine procedures such as taking blood pressures, or treating minor cold and flu complaints, headaches, and upset stomachs.

Each morning, the nurse is introduced in both the Senate and House chambers. And throughout the day, the nurse is encouraged to spend

time with legislators from their home counties. The WHA is happy to help facilitate those introductions.

The session begins February 8 and is scheduled to end in early March. To volunteer for the program, contact Rose Fishback at (307) 632-9344, or via email at rose@wyohospitals.com.