

IN BRIEF

HCMC, UHG WIN ASTER AWARDS

Two Minnesota health care organizations have won a national award for marketing campaigns. The Aster Awards, sponsored by Marketing Healthcare Today magazine, gives annual awards for excellence in health care advertising.

Among the eight winners in the "judge's choice" category of the Aster Awards were Hennepin County Medical Center (HCMC) in Minneapolis and Minnetonka-based UnitedHealth Group (UHG).

HCMC won for its "Will You Lose" campaign that sought to educate the public on the consequences of ending the state's General Assistance Medical Care program. UHG won for its Health Care Lane website, which provides an interactive guide to health benefits.

ALLINA SELLS FOUR CLINICS TO KANABEC HOSPITAL

Allina Hospitals and Clinics has sold four medical clinics in communities north of the Twin Cities to Kanabec Hospital in Mora. Details of the agreement are still being worked out, officials say, but a binding agreement for purchase was finalized on April 21 by the Kanabec Hospital board of directors. The four clinics will officially become

THE WEEK'S TOP STORIES

New Orthopedic Clinic Design Includes "Pods"

Twin Cities Orthopedics (TCO) will open a new, 75,000-square-foot clinic in Edina next month. The new clinic consolidates several of the practice's clinics into one site, and features an innovative new design and LEED certification, officials say.

Troy Simonson, administrator for TCO, says the new site will consolidate three existing clinics in Edina and Eden Prairie. The facility will host 34 physicians plus support staff, which will make orthopedic care more coordinated and efficient to provide, Simonson says.

An innovative part of the clinic's design was the incorporation of a "pods" approach to the clinic. The facility is broken into four separate areas with their own waiting rooms, which allows patients to get care with less walking around the facility, something that can be very helpful for patients with leg or spine conditions.

"It's one clinic, but to the patient it will seem like there are four separate clinics," Simonson says. "There are four waiting areas and reception desks, and each pod will hold up to three physicians, with cast rooms and x-ray right there. So to the patients, it still has the feel of a small clinic." The pods are also specialized into different areas, with pods for spinal conditions, care of upper extremities, sports orthopedics, and joint replacement.

The new clinic will see its first patients in early June, with the move from other clinics slated to be complete in July. The clinic is also planning on offering expanded evening hours, staying open until 9 p.m. starting in August, Simonson says.

Debate Centers on Medicaid Funds as Session Ends

Health care, and health care for Minnesota's poorest citizens in particular, continued to be a major focus for lawmakers struggling late last week to balance the state's budget.

Since Gov. Tim Pawlenty canceled funding for the General Assistance Medical Care (GAMC) program last May, state lawmakers and the health care community have been debating how to deal with a population that often has significant chronic illnesses and few, if any, resources to pay for care. GAMC fixes have been proposed, debated, passed, vetoed, and reconsidered by all sides. Underlying the debate is the fact that cutting funding for GAMC participants threatens not only their health, but the financial well-being of some of the state's largest hospitals.

Consensus has been building that Minnesota should take advantage of new Medicaid funding available to states that, like Minnesota, have provided health programs for very poor individuals. Under the Obama administration's health care reform, Minnesota would be eligible for \$1.4 billion in federal funding. However, the cash-stapped Legislature would also have to come up with matching funds.

Last week, health care groups and social service organizations joined together to call for accepting the Medicaid fix, which Pawlenty had opposed. Leaders



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IN BRIEF

part of the Kanabec Hospital system in January 2011.

The clinics are located in Mora, Pine City, and Hinckley. One of two clinics in Mora is an eye clinic; the others are primary care clinics.

Kanabec Hospital officials say with the change, the practices can be classified as provider-based clinics under Critical Access Hospital (CAH) regulations. The CAH program provides higher Medicare reimbursement rates than the clinics could receive otherwise.

Officials say Kanabec Hospital and Allina will continue to work together in providing health care to the communities around Mora. "The strategic partnership between Allina Hospitals and Clinics and Kanabec Hospital will benefit patients and the community by helping to ensure long-term availability of primary and specialty care physicians in the area," says Allina President and CEO Kenneth Paulus.

HEALTHPARTNERS TO OFFER ONLINE CARE WITH VIRTUWELL

HealthPartners has announced it will launch an online diagnosis and treatment Web site this fall.

The new service, to be called Virtuwel, will provide online diagnosis and treatment of common medical conditions, including prescriptions. The service will be available around the clock, seven days a week, officials say.

"Virtuwel is all about bringing more choices, affordable and easy-to-use options, and high-quality health care," says Mary Brainerd, HealthPartners' president and CEO. "As we've watched the popularity of our online care options grow in recent years, we've continued to develop new ways to help patients get the right care at the right time at the low-

THE WEEK'S TOP STORIES

from the Minnesota Medical Association (MMA), the Minnesota Hospital Association, and the Minnesota Nurses Association said at a press conference that the Medicaid solution would be preferable to the latest plan to fix GAMC, a solution that cut payments to providers drastically and had the support of only a handful of hospitals.

On May 12, the Minnesota House and Senate passed the final version of a Health and Human Services bill. The bill included the \$1.4 billion in federal funding over three years to help cover the GAMC population. But to capture the federal dollars, legislators made more health care program budget cuts, added surcharges, and sharply reduced payments to providers.

Ironically, MMA found itself arguing strongly for adopting the federal Medicaid funding on Monday and then on Thursday urged its members to oppose the Legislature's solution, which cut provider payments in order to match the federal Medicaid dollars.

The story took another turn, albeit an expected one, when Gov. Pawlenty then vetoed the HHS bill on May 13, citing provider surcharges as one of the reasons for his veto. However, Pawlenty left the door open to further negotiations. "It is a bill I think we could find some compromise on and potentially sign into law," Pawlenty said, noting that more talks with lawmakers would continue. "We're open to potential early enrollment in [Medicaid], but we've got to find a modified way to pay for it."

As of press time on Friday, lawmakers and health care advocates alike were waiting to see whether the legislative impasse could be overcome before the session ends today.

Big Employers, Insurers Team Up With Alliance for a Healthier Minnesota

An alliance of health plans, large employers, and public relations specialists have created a new campaign to promote prevention and wellness in Minnesota.

The Alliance for a Healthier Minnesota has founding members such as Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, Cargill, General Mills, HealthPartners, Target, and UnitedHealth Group. The initiative was created by the i.e. network, a trio of public relations/media experts who say they hope their effort will be a national model for health promotion and wellness.

The i.e. network consists of Rick Kupchella, a long-time Minneapolis news anchor; Tom Mason, a media strategist and former chief of staff for former Sen. Norm Coleman; and Greg Heinemann, a marketing expert who has worked with Best Buy, Toys R Us, and UnitedHealthcare. The group announced on May 7 they were launching the Alliance for a Healthier Minnesota as their first initiative.

"We realized that our largest corporations, such as General Mills, Target, Medtronic, and others, have a deep investment in the health of their employees," says Kupchella. "Each entity is bursting with health-based initiatives and programming, but what was missing was a forum for corporations to break out of their silos and engage with each other by opening the discussion of public health and

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est possible cost. We're excited about Virtuwell and what users will experience—a convenient, friendly, and easy-to-use way to get better.”

The service will provide rapid diagnosis and a treatment plan for routine medical conditions such as a cold, cough, allergy, ear pain, yeast or urinary tract infection, and others. HealthPartners officials say the cost will be lower than that for an office visit, and the service will be open to all consumers, not just members of HealthPartners health plans.

The announcement follows a move in January by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota to provide online health appointments for Blue Cross employees, a service that officials say will be expanded in the future.

MDH CALLS FOR ASTHMA ACTION PLANS

Officials with the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) are encouraging parents and caregivers to create written asthma action plans (AAP) for children with asthma.

Officials say an AAP helps patients and providers manage and prevent asthma symptoms by providing important information to those who come in contact with people with asthma.

MDH notes that providers can easily prepare an AAP through a new software application, called the interactive Asthma Action Plan (iAAP), which can be found at www.asthma-iAAP.com.

“The iAAP represents a huge accomplishment in making it easier for all Minnesota providers to implement asthma best practices. That’s why we are strongly encouraging providers to use this new evidence-based program for all patients with asthma,” says MDH Commissioner Sanne Magnan, MD.

THE WEEK'S TOP STORIES

sharing best practices. We see tremendous untapped potential in creating a network of health and wellness programming that, when aggregated, will have a profound impact on the health of Minnesotans.”

The alliance website says its members can provide “true health care reform” by working to promote healthier employees and communities in Minnesota. Mason of the i.e. network also sees the effort as an opportunity for private industry to advance its vision of health care reform. “Instead of waiting for the government to create a new standard of health care, it is our intent to mobilize progressive corporations and move people to action,” Mason says. “We know action follows informed engagement, which is exactly why we're committed to harnessing the information and resources that will move people to change behaviors and make us all healthier and better.”

The organizations have some ties to government initiatives, as they are working with the Minnesota Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP), a \$47 million grantmaking agency that funds health programs across the state.

Study Evaluates impact of Teen Parent Program

An interim report evaluating results from a program supporting teenage mothers in Minneapolis found that the program is succeeding at ensuring positive birth outcomes.

The Minnesota Visiting Nurse Agency (MVNA) began the program in 2001. Under the program, public health nurses support teen mothers and their babies via regular visits, help with necessities such as cribs and high chairs, connections with community resources, and working with high schools to keep mothers on track to graduate.

Preliminary results from a two-year study by Wilder Research assessed birth outcomes and other data for 526 pregnant and parenting teens, comparing teenage mothers who participated in MVNA's program with those who did not. Of teens in the MVNA program, 95 percent had babies with a healthy birth weight, compared to 90 percent of teens not enrolled in the program; 95 percent of teens in the program carried their babies to full term, compared to 89 percent for non-participant teens.

At a luncheon Wednesday where the study results were announced, Art Rolnick, director of research for the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis and a champion of early childhood development, noted there were two major challenges to maximizing educational opportunity for all children: engaging and empowering parents—which the MVNA program addresses—and the difficulty of getting political support to fund initiatives.

Studies have shown that “the return is enormous” from maximizing brain development prenatally to age 3, Rolnick said. Yet funding for early childhood development is being cut at the same time lawmakers consider a proposal to generate more than \$500 million for a new Minnesota Vikings stadium via taxes and lottery revenue.



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