

the Reporter



April 9, 2007

KEY LEGISLATION ADVANCES

Just before the legislature went on Spring Break, Governor Blagojevich signed **SB611** into law, extending the Certificate of Need (CON) program until May 31, 2007 – the scheduled end of the Spring legislative session. The new law, Public Act 95-0001, is the first state law enacted this year. IHA is continuing to work with legislators toward a longer-term extension of CON and reform of the program.

SB867, the nurse staffing bill supported by IHA, passed the Senate 55-0 and is headed for debate in the House. The bill bases nurse staffing decisions on the acuity level of patients and the competencies of the patient care team, rather than on rigid, one-size-fits-all ratios. Member advocacy was a major force in heading off bills that would have mandated such ratios. Now we need members to keep up the momentum by letting your representatives know that **SB867** is the best approach to aligning nursing resources with patient needs. You can send a letter or e-mail from our web site.

ADVERSE BILLS CHALLENGED

Two bills opposed by IHA would allow or expand limited-service providers, jeopardizing health care services for the broader community provided by full-service community hospitals. **SB264** would add birth centers to the demonstration programs of the Alternative Health Care Delivery Act. The safety and quality of such centers is questionable. They would accept low-risk, lower-cost births that now support hospital OB departments, leaving hospitals to deal with emergencies and high-risk patients. **HB829** would allow post-surgical recovery centers to become specialty surgical hospitals in order to increase reimbursement. Such centers would not have to meet the same

standards that full-service hospitals must meet, nor would they be subject to CON.

It's important to express your opposition to these bills, as well as to **SB1237** and **HB684**, which would require hospitals to give discounts to all uninsured patients regardless of income or assets. Details on all these bills and talking points for communicating with legislators, especially this week when they are home on Spring Break, are available from the home page of our web site.

ILLINOIS COVERED SPOTLIGHTED

Gov. Blagojevich spent last week traveling across the state to build support for his *Illinois Covered* plan, which would provide affordable access to health care coverage to all Illinoisans and would be funded by a gross receipts tax.

The *Illinois Covered* plan has been filed as **Amendment #1** to **SB5**, with a hearing scheduled for April 18 before the Senate Public Health and Human Services Committee. A hearing on the gross receipts tax, **Amendment #1** to **SB1**, will also be heard on April 18 before the Senate Revenue Committee. IHA supports *Illinois Covered*; for details, see our web site.

QUALITY EVENT FOCUSES ON EHR

Evanston Hospital will host the next Quality Encounter program on Thursday, April 12 from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. The program will feature Evanston Hospital leaders and staff addressing the planning, development, implementation, roll out, and complete integration of electronic health records (EHR) within the hospital setting, to improve quality of care and patient outcomes and reduce administrative reporting burdens. The program is geared toward hospital executives, board members, chief medical officers, directors of quality, and clinical staff leaders.

TORT SYSTEM GENERATES HIGH COSTS

A recent study by the Pacific Research Institute says that the nation's legal system costs the U.S. economy \$865 billion a year, chiefly because medical liability concerns prompt doctors to engage in expensive defensive medicine. The study's authors estimate that the additional \$124 billion a year in liability-based health care costs adds 3.4 million Americans to the rolls of the uninsured.

Another study by the U.S. Department of Justice, found that from 2000 to 2004, few medical malpractice insurance claims in seven states, including Illinois, closed with a payout to the person seeking compensation.

CONGRESS REJECTS CUTS BUT HOSPITAL FUNDING STILL AT RISK

Hospital leaders worked hard over the past weeks to urge legislators to reject proposed federal budget cuts. Thanks to your efforts, both the House and Senate passed FY2008 budget resolutions without proposed Medicare and Medicaid cuts of more than \$100 billion over five years. With Congress in recess until mid-April, now is the time to thank Illinois senators Dick Durbin (D) and Barack Obama (D), as well as your representatives, for their support and urge them to continue to protect health care. Hospital funding programs remain at risk throughout the budget process, particularly as "pay/go" rules compel Congress to offset any proposed spending increases with cuts elsewhere. For a list of Illinois lawmakers who signed letters to budget leaders please go to IHA's web site.

ILLINOIS UNINSURED ANALYZED

Health & Disability Advocates, a Chicago-based policy and advocacy organization has released a report showing the percent of adults without

health insurance in Illinois by poverty level and by state Senate and House districts. The percentage of adults without health insurance ranges from 10.6% in the 24th senatorial district (Hinsdale) to 37.6% in the 2nd district (Chicago), and from 9.8% in the 82nd house district (Western Springs) to 42.1% in the 1st house district (Chicago). The report is available at: www.ihatoday.org/issues/payment/uninsured/index/html.

BRIEFLY NOTED...

✓ The U.S. Census Bureau, last month, blamed a computer programming error for overestimating the number of Americans without health insurance coverage. The agency's revised estimates show that in 2005, 44.8 million people, 15.3 % of the population, were without health insurance, about 1.8 million fewer than previously reported in August 2006. In addition, the agency plans to issue revised figures for the years 1995 to 2003 when it issues the 2006 figures.

✓ Thank members of Congress for their support on the budget in person, and ask them to continue to protect Medicare and Medicaid to keep hospitals strong, by attending AHA's Annual Meeting, May 6-9 in Washington, D.C. For information and to register, go to IHA's web site, www.ihatoday.org.

✓ There's still time to register for the IHA Healthcare Workforce Conference scheduled for April 11. For additional information, please contact Dawn Wichmann at dwichmann@ihastaff.org or call 630-276-5843.