CHA Engages in Pre-Session Advocacy with Legislative Leaders

CHA's advocacy team met with chairs of the Human Services Committee to share information about hospital priorities for the 2014 Legislative Session. CHA has engaged in a series of pre-session meetings with various legislative leaders to provide an overview of the hospital community's work on Medicaid redesign and discuss how the hospital tax has impacted employees, services, and the communities hospitals serve.

During the meeting with State Senator Gayle Slossberg (D- Milford), discussion focused on how the redesign of Medicaid should be part of the legislative proposals that the Human Services Committee will consider this session. Discussions with State Representative Cathy Abercrombie (D-Meriden) focused on the importance of phasing down the hospital tax, not passing legislation that would increase the cost of healthcare by imposing additional statutory or regulatory burdens on providers, and the need to redesign the Medicaid program in a way that will ensure that patients continue to benefit from having access to the highest quality and safest care.

The CHA advocacy team will continue to hold pre-session meetings with legislative leaders and key staff to ask for support for the hospital community’s legislative agenda for the 2014 Legislative Session. The General Assembly will convene on Wednesday, February 5.

Affiliation of Western Connecticut Health Network and Norwalk Hospital Promises Ongoing Commitment to Community

With state approval for their affiliation now secured, Western Connecticut Health Network and Norwalk Health Services Corp. will move ahead with their promise to create a healthier future for the communities they serve. By joining forces, the new network can improve access, strengthen clinical programs, broaden the physician platform, expand the scope of career opportunities, and use resources more efficiently.

The new organization – comprising Danbury Hospital, New Milford Hospital, Norwalk Hospital, and their affiliates – includes some 822 beds that will be governed by a single board of directors and a unified mission to promote the health and well-being of people in the communities it serves.

"We are thrilled to begin this affiliation," said John M. Murphy, M.D., who will remain President and CEO, Western Connecticut Health Network. "Our exploration of this collaboration began nearly two years ago, when we started considering the benefits of working together to improve healthcare for our communities. We each bring strong legacies in not-for-profit, community-based care to our shared goal: providing greater access to a broader range of resources to help people lead healthier lives. Together we will build an integrated network of health services for our communities to redefine what a healthcare organization can offer."

Teams comprising staff from both hospitals are working to implement plans to integrate operations. The complete transition will likely take some time, said Dan DeBarba, Jr., former President and CEO of Norwalk Hospital and newly named Executive Vice President of the Network and President of Danbury Hospital, New Milford Hospital, and Norwalk Hospital. "Even in the short term, patients in our communities will experience the benefits of our collaboration. The new organization will offer greater access to a wider range of surgical and specialty care than either organization offered on its own. For staff, the new organization will continue to be a great place to work as we strengthen our commitment to medical education and research across all entities."

Patients will also benefit as the network migrates toward a single system of patient information, enhancing safety and the overall patient experience.

Hartford HealthCare Physician Represents Hospitals During AHA Presentation

Steven D. Hanks, M.D., Vice President of Medical Affairs, Hartford HealthCare Central Region, provided hospital perspective during a January 23 American Hospital Association (AHA) presentation of its legislative agenda. Dr. Hanks provided hospital perspective on the issues with the Recovery Audit Contractor (RAC) program.

Tom Nickels, Senior Vice President, Federal Relations, AHA, described the current challenging environment in which hospitals must operate. As Congress seeks to find solutions to address the nation’s deficit, Medicare and Medicaid payments for hospital services are a target for cuts. Meanwhile, hospitals face mounting pressure to maintain the access that patients and their communities expect.
The AHA is working to provide relief from excessive and harmful policies. Some of the issues discussed include recovery audit contractors and the need to develop more effective accountable care organizations.

Two-Midnight Rule Faces First Challenges from AHA and Others

The AHA, hospital associations in New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, and four hospital systems took the first steps this week to bring a federal court challenge to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services’ two-midnight inpatient admissions criteria and related policies.

The new medical admission criteria known as the two-midnight rule was adopted by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) for Federal Fiscal Year 2014. The rule specifies that inpatient hospital claims documented by an appropriate physician’s order that presumes the patient will be hospitalized for two midnights will be paid by Medicare Part A as an inpatient. Other observation type cases will be considered outpatient and paid from Trust Fund B. CMS estimates that this policy will increase inpatient payments by approximately $220 million.

To maintain budget neutrality for inpatient services, for the first time in history, CMS exercised its broad authority to make needed adjustments and applied a .2% reduction to the standardized amount. Many are challenging the accuracy of the .2% reduction. There are also concerns that the precedent set by the use of the broad authority statutory catch-all provision by CMS could lead to additional uses if the industry does not vigorously oppose the practice.

The American Hospital Association (AHA) is working with CMS to attempt to clarify or suspend this policy and withdraw the negative .2% budget neutrality adjustment.

Education Updates

2014 Joint Commission Standards and National Patient Safety Goals Update
Friday, February 7, 2014
8:45 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

National expert Diana Scott, VHA, will join us to present CHA’s annual full-day program outlining the 2014 Joint Commission Standards, specific changes in the standards, and National Patient Safety Goals. She will highlight challenges in the goals, and discuss strategies and best practices to address them. CHA is also pleased to have Mark Crafton, Executive Director of State and External Relations at The Joint Commission (TJC), as part of the program. His presentation will include a review of the new developments in patient safety and quality solutions emerging from The Center for Transforming Healthcare, as well as the most frequent Joint Commission Requirements for Improvement in Connecticut hospitals in 2013.

Target audience: All hospital and medical staff leaders and coordinators involved in Joint Commission survey preparation, including: patient care and physician executives, staff nurses, pharmacists, quality improvement professionals, infection prevention specialists, human resources professionals, utilization/case managers, social workers, risk managers, corporate compliance officers, and in-house counsel.

Continuing education credits will be awarded. Please see the brochure for more details.

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