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## Nurse Groups Gripe at Paterson

The New York State Nurses Association on Friday blasted the Paterson administration for not including nurses in the Health Care Reform Advisory Committee named last week. Gov. David Paterson named 37 organizations to the committee, but NYSNA wasn't among them. "The governor left out the state's largest nurses' professional association and RN union, ignoring the voices of registered nurses at hospitals and health care facilities around the state," NYSNA complained in a statement. Nurses are "crucial to successful health care reform," says the union. A spokesman for the governor declined to comment.

## Culturally Sensitive Care

Health care should be delivered with sensitivity to New York's myriad cultures: that is the impetus of a new study by the Commission on the Public's Health System on cultural and language competence. The report, prepared in partnership with the Brooklyn Perinatal Network and the Bronx Health Link and funded by the United Hospital Fund, examines examples of "culturally competent" care. Many New Yorkers face obstacles—such as language, racial and socio-economic barriers—that can limit or impact access to health care. "The goal of this study was to show what made people feel comfortable, culturally and linguistically, in a health care setting," says Commission Director Judy Wessler. "For providers to fully connect with their patients, they need to understand, or be open to learning, the cultural and language issues that impact the provider-patient relationship." The report is online at <http://www.cphsnyc.org/pdf/childhealth.pdf>.

## Electronic Applications

Neighborhood Health Providers is moving to electronic enrollment. The plan will stop sending paper Medicaid, Child Health Plus, and Family Health Plus applications to the New York City Human Resources Administration today. Instead, it will send them using the Facilitated Enrollment Electronic Application, a software product from the Hudson Center for Health Equity & Quality based in Tarrytown. Required documentation, such as a birth certificate, is scanned and linked with the application, eliminating lost or misplaced documentation. Before converting to FEEA, the plan hand-delivered crates filled with hundreds of paper applications to HRA every week. NHP is the second plan in New York City to convert to FEEA.

## Mental health providers: Where's our HIT funding?

Behavioral health providers are fighting to get federal funding for health information technology, in New York state as well as nationally. Mental health providers were omitted from HIT funding slated for primary care and hospital providers, and now they want their fair share.

Both houses of Congress recently introduced legislation (H.R.5040/S.3709) to extend HIT funding eligibility to behavioral health, mental health and substance abuse professionals and facilities. The House bill includes \$15 million for HIT grants next year. The Senate bill make behavioral health providers eligible for assistance from HIT Regional Extension Centers but doesn't actually provide funding, says the Coalition of Behavioral Health Agencies.

"Our people are scrambling to get up to HIT standards, and at the same time reimbursement revenue is drying up," says Phillip Saperia, the coalition's executive director. "We will be held to the same new standards for electronic medical records, but there is no money for the behavioral health sector."

The exception is funding for psychiatrists, who are medical doctors. But mental health providers in general must interact electronically with primary care and acute care providers. "Health care is moving to integrated care; we're saying, What about us?" Mr. Saperia says. Behavioral health providers are often left out of funding because they can't compete with the state's huge hospital lobby, he notes.

New York legislators are sympathetic but feel primary care is the best place to invest in HIT "to get the most bang for the buck," says Heather Mermel, the coalition's senior associate for policy and program development. The group also reached out to Senators Schumer and Gillibrand to gauge if they are willing to support a bill that funds HIT.

## At A Glance

**WHO'S NEWS:** Dr. Pradeep Chandra became chief medical officer of Interfaith Medical Center earlier this summer. He joined from Wyckoff Heights Medical Center, where he had been chairman of the Department of Medicine since 1997.

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