

PROFESSIONAL Connection

A Word From **President Lowthers**

Contract Re-Opener Successfully Closes Out 2008

As most of you already know, we recently renegotiated a portion of our contract in an effort to better compensate our members for their dedication to excellence. Our contract reopener marked improvements for Local 400 members and served to not only strengthen our local and its membership but also further cement the strong working relationship we have established with Kaiser Permanente.

I am pleased to report that the ratification vote was unanimous with over 100 members present. In the end, Local 400 members received additional wage increases, an improved retiree medical benefit reimbursement and a healthcare reimbursement program.

The new contract includes an additional across-the-board wage increase for all employees. Per the original agreement, all non-RN employees, received a three percent increase beginning October 1, 2008, and will receive another three percent increase October 1, 2009. Now, as a result of negotiations an additional one percent increase will be given to all non-RN employees April 1, 2010. Similarly, per the original agreement, all RN employees, received a four percent increase beginning on October 1, 2008, and will receive another four percent increase October 1, 2009. Negotiations also produced an additional one percent increase on April 1, 2010 for RN employees.

The new retiree medical benefits are extremely important. At a time when most employers look toward eliminating retiree healthcare coverage as a cost savings measure, Local 400 was able to negotiate an employer contribution of up to \$185 per month for retirees, their spouse and eligible dependents. The \$185 per month is for retirees with at least 25 years of service. Employees with fewer than 25 years will receive \$185 less four percent for each year under 25 years of service, not to dip below \$111 per person per month. This reimbursement will be helpful in ensuring that our members are able to retire with respectable, affordable healthcare benefits.

Negotiations also produced a healthcare reimbursement account providing for the conversion of 80 percent of unused sick leave into a HRA for all bargaining unit employees of the National Agreement who become medical coverage plan participants when they retire. Any unused sick leave accrued during or

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**C. James Lowthers, President
International Vice President**

Stewards' Seminar Looks to Build Upon and Improve Programs Throughout 2009

The last stewards' seminar of 2008, held November 12th, proved to be jam-packed with information regarding our progress over the last year as well as our mission for 2009. With approximately 30 stewards in attendance, our guest presenters gave a comprehensive overview on Kaiser Permanente's service and quality goals set forth throughout the year as they relate to our labor-management partnership.

After a warm welcome from Executive Assistant to the President Mike Earman who serves as director of member services with Local 400, the stewards heard from Ken Hunter, chief operating officer for Kaiser Foundation Health Plan of the Mid-Atlantic States Region. Hunter's remarks centered around three main goals: continuing to improve and maintain quality, improving service to members (patients) and improving cost of care. He suggested that technology and the power of an integrated delivery system should be used to achieve these goals.

Specifically, he noted that the Mid-Atlantic States Region is seeking to improve their quality and service performance numbers by 10 percent to not just meet the other healthcare delivery systems in the area but to exceed them. However, it is valuable to note that in many areas we have made improvements, such as in the areas of specialty care access and workplace safety. Just one year ago, the average wait time to see a specialist was 35 days; today it is 25 days. Kaiser hopes to improve this even further by reaching a goal of just seven days. Similarly, the rate of workers' comp claims in the Mid-Atlantic States Region declined by 18 percent in the last year, creating a dramatic improvement in workplace safety. Hunter also reported on the success of TPMG's recruitment program for MDs, noting that recruitment for the Mid-Atlantic States and new providers should be on board by next summer.

Another area of interest touched upon was access to primary care and ensuring that every member (patient) has his/her own personal care physician. Furthermore, Kaiser would like to see that an appointment or a solution be offered on the patient's first call to the call center and that every time that patient makes an appointment, they are seen by their same personal care provider and not just another team provider.

One of the highlights of Hunter's remarks was his announcement that Kaiser Permanente of the Mid-Atlantic States moved up in rank from 93rd to 86th in *U.S. News and World Report's* ranking of health plans.

Joining Ken Hunter was Jennifer Baldwin, RN, MPA, CNAA, regional nurse executive, who introduced herself to the stewards and extended her services to them as a resource for all staff nurses.

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One of Our Own Introduces Obama at a Campaign Rally

For most, just attending a political rally is an event that lasts a lifetime and for those lucky few who may get to meet their candidate of choice, that's a moment to retell over and over. However, our own Kathryn de Vocht, an operating room nurse from Vienna, VA, had the privilege only a very select few ever get to experience.

In the beginning of October, de Vocht was asked by the Virginia Democratic Committee to introduce then Presidential Candidate Barack Obama at a rally at Victory Landing Park in Newport News, VA. With nearly 20,000 people in attendance, including U.S. Congressman Bobby Scott from Virginia's 3rd congressional district, numerous Virginia State senators and the mayor of Newport News, de Vocht proudly introduced Obama on October 4th at the very rally in which he announced his healthcare plan.

After an introduction by Congressman Scott, de Vocht took to the dais. In her remarks she gave a first-hand account of the healthcare crisis in America, noting that she sees patients every day who have lost their healthcare coverage. "Many of us don't have much time before our healthcare becomes something we may have to sacrifice to stay afloat, and for too many Americans, that is a sacrifice they have already had to make," de Vocht stated. "But there is good news; in just over 30 days we can elect a leader who will put the interests of hard working, middle class Americans first. That leader is Barack Obama."

Watching from front row seats as de Vocht delivered her speech were Local 400 Executive Board member Mark Federici, Kathryn's



father Frank Seifert and Kathryn's friend Jeanne Bierkan, a longtime Obama supporter.

As de Vocht remarked, this rally was important to all healthcare professionals as it was the first time Obama laid out his plans to fix American's healthcare problems. "I couldn't have been prouder to be a nurse and introduce the next President of the United States as he introduced his healthcare plan," she noted.

Certainly, everyone in Local 400 is proud to have had Kathryn de Vocht representing our union and our profession at that historic rally.

UBT Scorecard Now Online

Unit Based Teams (UBT) have become a focal point of Kaiser Permanente's commitment to increased service and performance on the part of all of their healthcare professionals. The participating UBTs within the Kaiser Foundation Health Plan, specifically those within our Local 400 jurisdiction, have fully embraced this unique approach to performance improvement resulting in increased job satisfaction and improved patient care.

The complete UBT Scorecard for all participating UBTs within our jurisdiction is now available online by visiting www.ufcw400.org. Click on the "Spotlight on Kaiser" tab on the left side and then click on "UBT Scorecard."



Nurse Practice Department

Below are important contact names and numbers for all staff nurses who may have questions regarding clinical practice policies and procedures. The leaders and coordinators listed below are available to lend any assistance necessary so our staff nurses may provide the very best in patient care.

Jennifer C. Baldwin, RN, MPA, CNAA
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Stewards' Seminar

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es. She noted her goals of increasing staff education, evaluating policies and ensuring that the standards of care are the same at every medical center, to name a few of her plans.

Chuck Phillips, director of Human Resources for Kaiser Foundation Health Plan of the Mid-Atlantic States Region, addressed the seminar on the subject of HIPAA practices and violations. He specifically spoke of the company's national Compliance Policy entitled Sanctions by KP Against Workforce Members Who Fail to Comply. The statement outlines the three tiers of HIPAA violations and the sanctions that may be levied against an employee who violates, accidentally or willingly, patient confidentiality. "It is critical that we follow rules regarding patient confidentiality," Phillips stated.

The three tiers cited in the policy are:

Tier I: Accidental/unintentional or careless violation

Tier II: Intentional violation—not for personal gain and without malicious intent

Tier III: Willful and/or intentional violation—for personal gain, with malicious intent, or by gross negligence.

In response to these three tiers of violations, Human Resources outlines five levels of corrective action that include counseling, verbal warning, written warning, final warning and termination to be determined based on the severity of the violation. Phillips was careful to note that the guidelines statement, while necessary in order to show compliance with HIPAA, was simply designed to be a tool for managers to apply the tiers from the national policy to individual situations. He pointed out that it was not a joint effort with labor and does not take away an employee's right to grieve.

In his remarks, Phillips also touched upon the annual compliance training that everyone, from management on down, must complete once a year, citing automated systems and computers as typical sources of compromised privacy. Phillips added that the compliance training is one way that Kaiser ensures compliance with HIPAA laws.

The afternoon session of the seminar continued with a presentation from John Grandner, RN, MSN, CPNP, co-chair for the Regional LMP Service Committee, who spoke about quality on the national and local levels. In his role, Grandner consults on and develops service quality training programs for Kaiser Permanente

employees. His responsibilities include reporting to the employees on service issues. Grandner pointed out that he works in partnership with Ann Cahill, MAPMG VP of Strategic Services and Compliance Officer. John reported that he and Ann have developed a strong relationship built on mutual respect and trust.

From this relationship, the Regional Service Committee has developed initiatives to build on service within Kaiser. Those initiatives include hiring and recruiting for service and developing language to be used throughout Kaiser Permanente on a national level on job descriptions and performance evaluations for every single Kaiser employee.

Grandner stated that another goal of the Regional Service Committee was to create a Kaiser brand of customer service similar to the customer service level made famous by the Disney Corporation. He added that customer service experiences should be the same at every Kaiser location around the country. To this end, Grandner said that the Committee intends to have regular communications with all stewards on the national and regional levels regarding service training, and developing service behavior and its integration into the workplace via unit based teams.

Rounding out the seminar were Jan Nelson Drake, Au.D, and Pati Nicholson, PA-C, MPA, MPAS, Coalition of Kaiser Permanente Unions and national coordinator for Kaiser Health Plan Mid-Atlantic States, who spoke about unit based teams (UBT) and their impact on the workplace. Drake noted that building on the principles of the labor management partnership (LMP), UBTs are empowering employees to make quality performance improvements in their workplace. She added that by using the Rapid Improvement Method (RIM), UBTs are being taught the process by which to effect change while at the same time instituting the various improvements.

Furthermore, Drake, along with others from Kaiser's Mid-Atlantic States Region, are participating in a national quality training program in California which will qualify them as "performance improvement advisors." Through the Kaiser Performance Improvement Institute (PII), in conjunction with the non-profit Institute for HealthCare Improvement (IHI), the improvement advisors will work to standardize and coordinate an improvement model to be used across all regions. Using some of the tools from Lean Six Sigma, the PII launch has augmented our RIM process and introduced the program as "RIM Plus" which builds on RIM

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after 2006 may be used to fund the HRA. As of 2010, this arrangement will completely replace the 50 percent cash out language that exists in our current contract. These new HRAs are simply a win-win for both Local 400 members and the company as members receive a larger portion of their pay than previously negotiated for unused sick days while the company may see a decrease in absenteeism.

While we couldn't be happier with the improvements made to the contract, we also take great pride in the way in which we negotiated with Kaiser Permanente to achieve resolutions we could all live with. The level of cooperation during negotiations was consistent with the relationship we have built with Kaiser

Permanente through the partnership agreement. This partnership is truly a unique arrangement that we are fortunate to be a part of. It gives you an opportunity to steer the company in which you give so much of your time, expertise and commitment while at the same time providing a venue in which we can honestly and earnestly fight for the benefits and workplace rights each of you so rightly deserve.

I think we can all agree that we closed out 2008 on a high note and have so much to look forward to in 2009 and beyond.

My best wishes to you and your families for a healthy and prosperous New Year.

Stewards' Seminar

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and uses the improvement advisors as foot soldiers on the front line to support this effort.

Citing the success of the UBT approach, Drake noted the efforts of a team in Northern Virginia to get the first patient of the day in the exam room on time and ready to see the doctor within five minutes of their appointment. The team went from a 40 percent success rate in this regard to an 85 percent success rate within two months.

Pati Nicholson added that the company is looking for additional employees from labor who might be interested in serving as a UBT performance improvement specialist. Such specialists would work for one year through a lost time agreement learning facilitation and meeting skills and RIM in order to serve as support personnel to UBTs.

As part of an update on LMP Work Force Planning and Development given by Nicholson, she indicated that the workforce planning team is currently looking for associate degree RNs in the bargaining unit who would be interested in earning their bachelor's degree in a non-traditional manner, such as credit via examination and life experience. Nicholson asked that interested parties contact Iris Woodard, regional WFPD coordinator, at the regional offices for information. Upgrading our nurses' degrees serves as a win-win for both labor and management, giving our nurses an opportunity to earn a higher degree without committing the time in a brick and mortar classroom while offering management the most highly skilled workforce possible. As part of the WFPD update, Nicholson also informed the stewards that all represented staff who are currently receiving wage replacement under the Ben Hudnall Educational Trust individual stipend program will need to complete a new stipend application form for 2009. The form is available online.

The stewards left the seminar knowing that the tools are in place to take Kaiser to the next level in healthcare offerings and that their involvement will be crucial to the success of the company and the employees who keep things running each and every day. While Kaiser's Mid-Atlantic States Region has enjoyed much success in many regards, 2009 will be an important year as we hope to see the many new programs and improvements really take hold and set Kaiser head and shoulders above the rest.

New Fredericksburg Center to Open in January

This month will mark an important milestone for Kaiser Permanente—the opening of its 30th medical center to be located here in the mid-Atlantic region. The new Fredericksburg Medical Center will be housed in an almost 30,000-square-foot building adjacent to Mary Washington Hospital in Fredericksburg, Virginia.

In addition to offering primary care services for children and adults, the beautiful new center will also house a laboratory and a pharmacy. Specialty services will be offered through contracted specialty providers in the area.

The new Fredericksburg Medical Center will offer all of the same conveniences to its patients that all other Kaiser Permanente facilities around the country offer. Patients at the Fredericksburg center will be able to utilize the website www.kp.org to take advantage of KP HealthConnect and view their lab results, make and check appointments, ask for medical advice, email their doctor, and request prescription refills, among many other services.

In a recent press release, Marilyn Kawamura, president of Kaiser Permanente of the Mid-Atlantic States Region, commented, "We have almost 7,000 members in the Fredericksburg area that currently utilize our other medical centers and this expansion allows us to offer our quality health care closer to home."

Our Local 400 members who will be on site at the Fredericksburg Medical Center are certain to bring the expertise and commitment to this new facility that will make it one of the leading medical centers in the Kaiser Permanente network.

United Food and Commercial Workers Local 400

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