

# PROFESSIONAL Connection

## A Word From President Lowthers

### I am Proud of Members' Achievements in 2008

As all eyes have been focused on our troubled economy and the news around us seems at times to be more than distressing, it gives me great pride knowing that Local 400's Health Care Professionals not only continue to be at the forefront of the industry but are earning the recognition they well deserve from Kaiser Permanente. We're pleased with the bonuses our professionals received as a result of the level of service and commitment they consistently deliver every day to the member patients.

With purse strings tighter than ever now, the fact that Local 400 members received such bonuses also speaks volumes about the working relationship we have fostered with Kaiser Permanente through our Labor Management Partnership, a truly unique relationship. The Partnership has created a mutually beneficial environment in which labor and management alike can be open and honest with each other in order to create a more productive and effective workplace.

Because the opinions and participation of Local 400 members help drive the initiatives and programs both internally with the corps of Health Care Professionals and externally with the patients, our members have a vested interest in the success of these programs and Kaiser benefits as a result. One example of this is the success we have experienced with our Unit Based Teams (UBTs), which have allowed our members to have a hands-on approach to tackling some service and quality issues identified by Kaiser. I think everyone can agree that our UBTs have shown promise. UBTs have put the power back in the hands of the very people on Kaiser's frontlines—the Health Care Professionals.

Ironically, the type of relationship we have been able to create through our Labor Management Partnership is exactly the kind of relationship unrepresented workers throughout the U.S. would have chance of achieving with passage

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



## Stewards' Seminar Addresses Challenges Local 400 Members Face as Health Care Collides with the Pressure to Compete

The first stewards' seminar of 2009 was held on February 26th with more than 30 area stewards in attendance. The agenda was full and the roster of speakers impressive as the attendees immediately got down to the business of planning for the future of Kaiser Permanente Mid-Atlantic.

With a troubled economy on everyone's mind these days, the remarks delivered by Ken Hunter, chief operations officer for KPMA, were both timely and necessary. Hunter spoke about the impact the economy is having on the delivery of health care within the Kaiser network. As it is doing to nearly every industry across the board, the unstable economy is making it more difficult to secure funding for large projects and making it even more important than ever to retain the customers we currently have.

Hunter noted that due to Kaiser's reported loss in earnings, all new construction is being carefully planned. He added that most of the money KPMA borrows comes from California bonds and it is getting harder to access that money. So, with less money to invest and a dip in the customer base, the company has been forced to be more conservative.

On a positive note, with the federal government likely to hire more and more people, KPMA is well positioned for growth within the federal government, something we haven't seen in more

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## Stewards' Seminar

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than seven years. However, Hunter cautioned that it will still be critical to retain the customers we currently have. He added that there is a big push within The Permanente Medical Group to hire more doctors, improve access and improve ambulatory care, all of which will serve the company well in its efforts to grow and better serve customers in this challenging economy.

In closing, Hunter commented that he was heartened by the People Pulse results which improved across the board by 10-11% and that Reward for Results is in the process of being finalized.

A lively question and answer session followed Hunter's remarks in which the participants raised such concerns as whether members are being notified that Kaiser is hiring more doctors to stave off frustrations and where these new doctors will work given the tight working conditions that currently exist. Other questions focused on how well positioned Kaiser is within President Obama's new healthcare plan.

Sharon Cunningham, RN; John Grandner, RN, MSN, CPNP; Jan Nelson-Drake, Au.D.; and Deb Grinder, RN, presented detailed labor leader reports. Cunningham, who met with the TPMG Physician group to incorporate the Northern California protocols into the Mid-Atlantic outcomes, reported that the California team was most impressed with the level of partnership

they found in the Mid Atlantic Region which is a contradiction to the relationship in northern California where the CNA has chosen not to be a member of the partnership.

In her role, Cunningham is working with the call center steering committee to train in partnership all call center staff in these new protocols, which are being rolled out this month.

John Grandner, who serves on the Quality and Workforce Development Team, addressed the seminar about his participation in the New Member Identifier Subgroup which seeks to ensure that all new members have a good experience with Kaiser Permanente across the company. Specifically, Grandner spoke about the subgroup's plan to get new members attached to Kaiser, to use Kaiser regularly, to promote Kaiser and to essentially fall in love with Kaiser. One idea the subgroup is working on is flagging the charts of new members within Health Connect to follow these members for the first 12 months or first five visits. Grandner noted, "The first two years are critical." He also asked the attendees for their suggestions in reaching out to low utilizers and capturing their interest.

Jan Nelson-Drake, together with Deb Grinder, detailed the work of a performance improvement specialist in supporting UBT leadership (UBTL) in centers so they can target specific UBT teams. Nelson-Drake explained that she and Grinder are working on a lost-time agreement and are spending most of their time in centers helping team leaders collect data and

## Well Being of Kaiser Employees a Major Focus of Seminar

We talk so much about health care delivery for our customers, yet we rarely address the good health of our own health care providers. The truth is, without a healthy team of providers, we will not be able to care for our customers and continue to compete at the level Kaiser has come to be known for.

For this reason, a special discussion on creating and maintaining a healthy workforce was included in our most recent stewards' seminar. Led by Pati Nicholson, who serves as CKPU national coordinator for the Kaiser Health Plan of the Mid-Atlantic States, the attendees learned more about the importance of creating a healthy workforce as mandated by our national agreement.

"It is our business to be healthy on the job," Nicholson stated. With Kaiser employees and their families the largest

employer group in Kaiser, there is an even greater incentive for the workforce to be healthy. Nicholson pointed out that Kaiser employees and their families have high rates of chronic conditions, such as diabetes, depression, coronary artery disease, heart failure and asthma. In fact the rates for depression and asthma are even higher for employees than for plan members. Depression has been cited as the number-one ailment plaguing the workforce, costing the company more than \$130 million on a national level and putting employees at grave risk.

The goals of the Healthy Workforce (HWF) initiative are three fold: 1. to make health care more affordable by cutting back on health care costs; improving attendance and productivity; and decreasing injury and illness; 2. to create the best





understand the metrics, and helping launch targeted UBT teams.

Nelson-Drake added that while it is a challenge to get teams up and running, she is seeing great examples of success. Among the examples she cited were the Burke, VA, facility which has improved its track record of getting patients in on time and the Gaithersburg, MD, facility which exceeded its goal of getting 83% of their female patients in for mammograms.

Grinder added to the presentation by explaining how she came in to her new position and noted that she spends much of her day shadowing improvement specialists to see how they integrate with their UBTLs and UBTs.

On a safety note, Bev Moyer, labor workplace safety coordinator, and Jeannine White, RN, BSN, spoke about safety in the workplace. Moyer noted that KPMA reached its safety goals for 2008 and so far is on the right track for 2009. In 2008, KPMA went into four target centers and for 2009 plans to go into five target centers—Camp Springs, Shady Grove, Reston, Fair Oaks and Woodlawn. She added that ergonomics will be a major focus in 2009.

White addressed the Transitional Work Program and Kaiser's desire to keep people working after an illness or injury, if possible, and to bring them back to work as quickly and safely as possible. She noted that there are not enough people in the Transitional Work Program perhaps because not enough people know about it.

The afternoon session also featured a comprehensive presentation by Pati Nicholson, CKPU national coordinator for the Kaiser Health Plan for the Mid-Atlantic States. Nicholson discussed the 2009 RN to BSN program that will be funded through the Ben Hudnall Memorial Trust, describing it as, "the best investment in our nurses." She encouraged the stewards to talk to their nurses about it and visit the Kaiser intranet to get more information on the Ben Hudnall scholarship and wage replacement.

However, the most important message Nicholson implored upon the stewards was the importance of their role as a leader and their charge of making other union members leaders too. She asked that everyone "inspire leadership in all of the union represented members."

Nicholson added that by October 2010, 100% of our facilities in contract states will have UBTs. Furthermore, as part of the budget for UBT work, there will be money for those who spend one to two hours per week in support of UBTs, such as coaching on the RIM process, gathering metrics, etc. The time will be charged back to the LMP UBT account.

The level of commitment from the stewards could be witnessed throughout the room as the dialogue between the speakers and the attendees proved to be a valuable asset to the seminar. And, by the end of the day, the stewards were re-energized to head back to their facilities ready to tackle the unique challenges that this new year, new economy and new era in health care will bring.

in quality and service by improving health outcomes for employees; decreasing absenteeism; improving productivity, recruitment and retention; and serving as a model employer group for customers; and 3. creating one of the best places to work by improving health and morale; increasing involvement and engagement; increasing job and life satisfaction; and making employees feel valued and supported. In order to meet these goals, a Healthy Workforce Inter-Regional Work Group, in which Nicholson is a member, was created. The group's goals for 2009 include encouraging all employees to participate in a Total Health Assessment (THA) in order to establish a baseline from which to work, creating a core set of Healthy Workforce programs, encouraging leadership engagement to create a culture of health and wellness, improving Healthy Workforce communications, establishing a means by which to measure data to determine the effective-

ness of the program, and further developing the Healthy Workforce infrastructure.

Janice Bethea and Wanda Gant, labor representatives to the Healthy Workforce team, added to Nicholson's presentation speaking about some of the specific wellness programs Kaiser has in place for its employees, such as the 10,000 steps program. They stressed to the stewards that Kaiser can't sell good health and well being to its customers if the employees themselves are not living healthy lifestyles.

Poor health is a growing concern among all Americans, from obesity to heart disease, and too many of our own Kaiser employees are rapidly finding themselves among the ranks of the ill they are treating each and every day. Kaiser's desire to halt this progression is a measure that serves more than just the corporate bottom line but also serves to protect and elevate the very health care providers who keep the company successful.



## A Message from Kathleen Schmidt, KP/LMP contract specialist

What is a labor leader? A leader has been defined as a guide or conductor who has commanding authority or influence and directs a unit towards the achievement of a goal. A good leader undertakes a never-ending plan of self study and educational training and experience.

A labor leader has an additional goal—to support the contract and educate both their peers and managers regarding contractual matters. In a partnership environment, like Kaiser Permanente, that also extends to supporting the national and regional goals of the company.

Through the National Initiative of Unit Based Teams (UBTs), all employees at Kaiser Permanente are encouraged to become leaders. With the formation of targeted UBTs, we are all called upon to find solutions to workforce issues. By following the Value Compass, we can do our work more efficiently and cost effectively, without sacrificing service or quality.

The empowerment of all members of the team to effect change will make Kaiser Permanente the best place to work. In the future, we will all be called upon to step up and be a labor leader in our workplace. With the help and support of Local 400, I know we will rise to that call.

## I am Proud of Members' Achievements in 2008

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of the Employee Free Choice Act. Just as our Labor Management Partnership gives our Health Care Professionals a voice on the job, so too would the Employee Free Choice Act give unrepresented workers a voice in their workplace. With debate heating up as the bill readies for a vote in Congress, it makes me all the more thankful that our partnership gives our members a say, free of intimidation, harassment and fear of losing their job. Sadly, unless the Employee Free Choice Act is passed, such freedom of speech and representation on the job will be but a pipe dream for far too many workers.

I hope each of you will join me in supporting passage of the Employee Free Choice Act by reaching out to your members of Congress and urging them to do right by America's working men and women. Local 400 members at Kaiser know the benefits of workplace rights and we owe it to all workers to help them achieve the freedoms we enjoy.

Once again, I want to extend congratulations on a fine year. Each of you has proven that labor and management can work together, achieving success and earning mutual respect.

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