

# The Monitor

## Navigating the health care system

BY PAULETTE JOHNSON

Have you ever had a family member admitted to the hospital, hospice, or skilled nursing facility, and you had no idea what to do to make sure that person received adequate medical care?

In the past five years, I've spent innumerable hours with family members who have required all three (hospital, skilled nursing, hospice).

As a result, I've learned a lot that neither I nor most people know about how the health care system works — or doesn't work.

Here's what my husband and I have learned from our "baptism by fire." Hopefully, our experience will help spare you the frustration we've endured and also prepare you to stand up for your loved ones when they really need you.

### The ER/Hospital Experience

Arrive prepared because you may be there all day or all night. Bring your family member's ID, medical and insurance cards, two or more copies of a printed list of all medications and when and how they are taken, two or more copies of your family member's medical

history, a bag full of current medications, a power of attorney, a health care directive, and any other necessity if your loved one will be there 12 hours or more, such as glasses, reading materials, toiletries, and even food.

Don't expect your family member's primary care or other doctors to show up. Many doctors no longer follow their patients in the hospital.

They turn their care over to "hospitalists" (physicians assigned to care for patients while in the hospital) or other medical professionals. Some primary care doctors will not intervene or accept phone calls during your loved one's hospital stay.

Still, before your family member goes to the hospital, ask the doctor if s/he will visit the patient in the hospital. Ask about consulting with the doctor during your loved one's stay and ask if s/he will be in contact with the hospitalists.

Some hospitalists will not speak directly with you or return your calls — you'll have to go through the nursing staff to get messages to them. Ask if an individual hospitalist will follow the patient through-

(See HEALTH CARE, page 2)

## ***BBQ attracts 60-plus***

BY GARY MORGAN

More than 60 retirees attended the first VCCCDRA barbecue at Oak Grove Park in Camarillo.

The event was held in mid-October under clear skies.

Retirees were treated to the culinary expertise of Bob Reeves, ably assisted by Wally Soo Hoo, who kept the tri-tip, chicken, and side dishes coming during the three-hour-long event.

Meanwhile, retirees renewed acquaintances with former co-workers as they ate or awaited their turn at the food table.

Planning and organization for the barbecue was done by the association's newly-formed Social Committee.

Members of that committee include Tanya Burke, Pat Gage, Marta Garza, Teri Lara, Doris McTague, Bob Reeves, Betty Sahota, and Marie (and Wally) Soo Hoo.

The committee is already at work planning next year's gathering. Anyone interested in helping is asked to contact a committee member.

A few of the photos taken at the barbecue appear elsewhere in this edition.

# Health care: Be there for your loved one

(From page 1)

out the hospital stay or if they rotate, so that your family member may see a different doctor every day.

No one knows your loved one like you do. Therefore, you must become their warrior, advocate, and teacher.

Without the primary care physician present, it is up to you to educate everyone who deals with your family member about their medical history, medications, allergies, and even changes in protocol (*i.e.*, if meds that were prescribed caused a bad reaction, the family member should not take them).

Communication among hospital staff is haphazard at best, and you must never assume the next RN, LVN, CNA or even new doctor has been given all the information. Also, especially if loved ones are elderly, they may give misleading information (such as saying that they are “fine” when they are actually in pain).

If you want your family member to have the best care, you must ***be there!*** Establish communications with the hospital staff – especially the hospitalist – and talk to them often. You have the right to ask questions and advocate for your loved one. But be as nice as you can. Most health care professionals are caring people, but they are stuck in a really dysfunctional system and often feel overwhelmed themselves.

The system will often push you to the brink. If you cannot remain cool, call in someone from the

family who can. Be businesslike – brief and to the point. Don’t take “no” for an answer if it doesn’t make sense. Trust your gut instincts.

Hospitalists are paid based on diagnosis, not by length of stay. There is no incentive for a hospital to keep your family member there if it receives the same insurance or Medicare reimbursement for a one-day or a twenty-day stay. For example, women are having four-hour outpatient mastectomies. If you believe your loved one should stay longer than does the hospitalist, then you must advocate for a longer stay.

Watch your family member’s medications like a hawk! Don’t assume the ER or hospital doctors will keep up on your loved one’s medication regimen, because they most likely will not.

If a certain medication is essential for your family member, you must either ask for it or bring a supply of it from home.

Also, understand that hospitals don’t have access to every medication. They dispense only those medications listed in formularies (meds approved for the hospital by a committee of physicians). If your loved one needs a specific, brand-name (non-generic) medication, you may have to furnish it yourself. Otherwise, the hospital may substitute a similar type drug without telling you. Ask direct questions about meds (*i.e.*, “Is Mom getting Nexium or a substitute?”).

Expect that the hospital’s medications list could have errors, especially if your family member was admitted through the ER.

Ask to see the medications list, compare it to your own, and ask for explanations for differences and for medication changes on a regular basis. Check the list again if your loved one is moved.

Finally, don’t expect your family member’s medicines to follow him or her from facility to facility. Hospitals and nursing homes send orders for medications, but not actual meds, to your loved one’s next facility, which could leave the patient without meds for some period of time.

If sent to the next facility, or even to home, on a weekend, your family member could be without important meds for two full days. Discuss medications with hospital or nursing homes before your loved one is discharged, and ask the facility to send prescription orders long before discharge.

## The Hospice Experience

A hospice isn’t what you imagine it to be. By definition, a hospice is for patients who are expected to

(See HEALTH CARE, page 3)

## In Memoriam

It is with sadness that we report the passing of our friends and colleagues:

Pandita Cole

Edith Conn

Evelyn James

# Health care: Medicare has its limits

(From page 2)

live less than six months, but it is also a business, pure and simple.

Although some hospices exist to provide compassionate care, most are medical hospices reimbursed through Medicare. They are allocated a fixed dollar amount per day for care, which means (for example) your family member may see the nurse twice a week instead of daily. We were told that hospices provide “intermittent care,” not “continuous care.”

Hospice care may be provided in a nursing home, assisted living facility, or at the family member’s own home. Many hospice companies operate in Ventura County, so shop around, since the service they provide varies greatly from one to another. For example, many hospices will not provide an IV at home. This can be hugely important to your loved one and to you (imagine giving oral morphine to someone every hour for 36 hours).

If you need 24/7 help for your family member, you may need to hire a caregiving nurse yourself. Make arrangements for that before your loved one needs it.

Think twice before you opt for hospice care! Not all ailments qualify for hospice. Once your family member is enrolled in hospice care, Medicare will no longer pay for skilled nursing home costs, which average over \$200 per day in Ventura County.

Remember that you (and your loved one) have the right to choose or to quit hospice at any

time.

## The Nursing Home Experience

Several nursing homes/skilled nursing facilities/convalescent hospitals exist in Ventura County, so shop around — they vary in quality of care. Use online resources that rate and compare nursing homes to help you make the right decision for (or with) your family member.

Also, visit the facility before your loved one is admitted to get an impression of its suitability and “ambiance.”

Medicare has limits on what it

**Use online resources  
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to help you make the  
right decision. . .**

will cover and the length of stay in a nursing home/skilled nursing facility, which is considered to be an intermediary step between a hospital stay and a return home. Medicare will cover the nursing home’s daily rate as long as your family member has an illness that meets its guidelines and as long as the patient is improving or has hope of improvement. Medicare’s coverage will cease if your loved one has no hope of rehabilitation or is enrolled in hospice care.

Medicare coverage information for skilled nursing facilities can be found at <http://www.medicare.gov/publications/>

[pubs/df/10153.pdf](http://pubs/df/10153.pdf).

Generally, Medicare will cover some nursing home costs for up to 100 days, with full coverage for just 20 days. Secondary insurance policies, such as Anthem Blue Cross, may pick up a portion of costs not covered by Medicare.

As at many hospitals, most primary care physicians will not visit patients at nursing homes. For this reason, you should find a doctor who will follow your family member to the nursing home. Otherwise, the facility will choose a doctor for you, which could dramatically affect the quality of your loved one’s health care.

While in a nursing home, Medicare only requires a doctor to visit your family member once a month and, incredibly, some nursing homes do just that. Therefore, contact the doctor and make sure s/he will communicate with you and will be available when your loved one needs to be seen.

A nursing home must have a case meeting with a family representative (you) soon after admission. The meeting must include an administrator, nurse, occupational therapist, physical therapist, dietician, and social worker. The meeting must take place after the first assessment, within eight days of admission. Ask for this meeting as early as possible, and ask that those who attend are the people who will be serving your family member.

Nursing home personnel may make decisions about your loved one without informing you. It is not uncommon for the physician to

(See HEALTH CARE, page 4)

# Retirees named to District panel

## *Culotta, Rodriguez on Citizen's Advisory Board*

**BY HARRY CULOTTA**

Two retirees — current President Harry Culotta and Past President Rene Rodriguez — have been appointed to the VCCCD Board of Trustees Citizen's Advisory Body (CAB).

Created in 2010, the CAB was initially comprised of nine board-appointed local residents, to advise the board on issues affecting education.

Community input is especially important in light of the District's anticipation of an 11 to 13 percent funding cut in for 2011-12. As a result, the district has a corresponding need to reduce enrollment by more than 2,000 full time equivalent students (FTES) to align with expected

funding levels.

In response to an accreditation team recommendation that the District include community input and feedback on its efforts to improve planning processes, in 2011 the trustees expanded the CAB to a 21-member panel.

Steven Blum, board chair, appointed Culotta and Rodriguez.

Other members of the CAB include (for example) Jeffrey Baarstad, Superintendent, Conejo Valley Unified School District; Debbie Freeman, Counselor, Foothill Technology High School; Hank Lacayo, President, California Congress of Seniors; Stan Mantooth, Ventura County Superintendent of

Schools; Cheryl Moore, Executive Director, Workforce Investment Board; Sandra Rubio, Executive Director, Ventura Center for Dispute Settlement; and Richard Simpson, Business Representative, IBEW Local 952.

Members of the Citizens Advisory Body attended a Board of Trustees special study session on Sept. 15 to discuss district and board goals and related objectives.

To learn more about the board's goals and objectives, visit [http://www.boarddocs.com/cavcccd/Board.nsf/files/8M5UQB7A702F/\\$file/Board%20Strategic%20Vision%20Objectives%20Goals%202011-12%20Rev2%209%2028.pdf](http://www.boarddocs.com/cavcccd/Board.nsf/files/8M5UQB7A702F/$file/Board%20Strategic%20Vision%20Objectives%20Goals%202011-12%20Rev2%209%2028.pdf)

# Health care: Be alert, be informed

(From page 3)

change medications, change the discharge date, or stop treatment without your knowledge.

Nursing home staff may ask the physician to make those changes. They may call in a specialist without informing you.

Establish up front that you want to be notified of any changes in care for your loved one, including medications.

This is especially important if your family member is physically

incapable of doing so or has dementia.

Visit your family member often — once a week isn't often enough. Many families think of nursing homes as 'rehab' and sometimes don't visit their loved ones at all.

You need to be there for your family member for the same reasons you need to be at the hospital: to monitor medications, observe the quality of care, advocate for your loved one, and monitor their progress.

Standing with, and for, a family member in the hospital, hospice,

or nursing home can be exhausting, not only because you are witnessing that person's suffering, but also because you must sometimes battle to get what is needed.

Some of the many flaws in the health care system are worsened by Medicare and some by insurance company mandates. Regardless, you must be more alert, watchful, informed, assertive, and perhaps more forceful than you want to be.

But you really have no choice, — your loved one's life could depend on it.

## The first VCCCDRA barbecue

# *A good time was had by all*



Bob Reeves, assisted by Wally Soo Hoo, keep a watchful eye on the tri-tip and chicken. (Photo by Marie Soo Hoo)



George and Bev Lanning make their way through the food line as Wally Soo Hoo prepares still more tri-tip and chicken. (Photo by Marie Soo Hoo)



Members of the Social Committee include (left to right) Bob Reeves, Pat Gage, Marta Garza, Tanya Burke, Teri Lara, Wally Soo Hoo, and Marie Soo Hoo. (Photo by Harry Culotta)

# It's time to publish a new VCCCDRA roster

BY DON MEDLEY

The time has come to publish a new name and address roster for the VCCCD Retirees' Association. To insure that we publish only what you approve, please complete the following and return the information to me or email me at [don.medley@verizon.net](mailto:don.medley@verizon.net) by **January 10, 2012**. Simply detach the form below and send it (or email) it to me. Thank you for your help.

**If you DO NOT respond, We will publish your name, address, telephone and email address.**

**[NOTE: If you receive snail mail that has a handwritten address it means that the association does not have the information. We prepare a label with only your name and the District is kind and adds the address. Please help us keep our addresses up to date!!!]**

Don B. Medley  
110 Flora Vista Avenue  
Camarillo, CA 93012-5170  
805-482-8761  
[don.medley@verizon.net](mailto:don.medley@verizon.net)

## PUBLICATION INFORMATION FORM

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zipcode: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone : \_\_\_\_\_ ( ) unlisted do not publish Email: \_\_\_\_\_

**Publication Request: If you do not respond, we will publish your name, address, telephone number and email address.**

\_\_\_\_\_ Include Name, Address, Telephone Number and email.

\_\_\_\_\_ Include Name, Address, and email but not telephone number.

\_\_\_\_\_ Include Only Name, and Telephone Number.

\_\_\_\_\_ Include Only Name, and email.

\_\_\_\_\_ Include Name, Telephone Number and email.

\_\_\_\_\_ Include Name only.

\_\_\_\_\_ Do Not include my name in the roster. **I will not receive a copy of the roster.**

## Membership Report by Don Medley

**IF YOU RECEIVE A PRINTED COPY OF THIS, AND IF THE ADDRESS IS HAND-WRITTEN, IT MEANS IT WAS ADDRESSED BY THE DISTRICT, WHICH CANNOT SUPPLY US THE ADDRESS. IF YOU DO NOT SEND US YOUR ADDRESS, WE WILL REMOVE YOU FROM OUR LABEL FILE AND YOU WILL RECEIVE NO MONITORS IN THE FUTURE.**

### **WE NEED ADDRESSES! THERE ARE MANY NEW RETIREES!**

**WE NEED ADDRESSES/PHONE NUMBERS/EMAIL ADDRESSES FOR THE FOLLOWING PEOPLE. If you can help, call Don Medley at 805-482-8761 or email to don.medley@verizon.net. Thank you for your help.**

Robert Anderson	Beverly Barker	Eddie Baugh	Margaret Boles	James Botting
Elizabeth Bowker	Donald Brockett	Reginald Burrier	Vincent Campo	Margaret (Peggy) Castor
Susan Carter	Linda K. Chapman	Paul Conley	Christy Corbett	Jeanette Cortez
Aseneth Cota	Paulette Cox	James Crowley	David Donaldson	Patricia Dozen
Patricia Earl	Franceen Fallett	Katherine Felter	Ruby Filar	Dallas Flanigan
Robert Forest	Christina Garcia	Gullian Dale	Ron Halleran	Lucia Haro
Juan Hernandez	Judith Hunt	Marge Imbach	Erlinda Tuyor Ispahani	Deborah Jacobson
Ralph James	Achla Jinda	Donna Johnson	Michael Johnson	Anne Kairschner
Steven Kegley	Norma Letinsky	Michael McGann	Gaynor McGhee	Olivia Menchaca
Victorino Mercado A	Alfred Miller	Michael Munoz	Janet Murdock	Norlene Neal
Earl O'Neill	Stasia O'Neil	James Owen	Lucy Paez	Maria Parker
Barbara Partee	Arthur Preston	Steve Price	Steve Righetti	John Roach
Emile Robb	Ofelia Romero-Motlagh	Mary Ruiz	Joe Sabedra	Tomas Sanchez
Reynaldo Santos	Isaiah (Zeke) Simmons	Judy Skahl	Larry Smithson	Mark Thomas Spragins
Art Szylewicz	E. Burns Taft	Mary Taylor-Parr	Neriman Urkmez	Sue Wall
Florencia Wallace	Ernest Williams	Janice Wiley	Charles Wilson	

### **Please correct your roster with the following changes:**

Jose DeGuzman	Teri Hernandez	Charles Hewson	Frances E. Hughes
Maricarmen Ohara	John Ostrander	Robert Reeves	Bill McEnroe
Diane Sukiennik	Dora Washington	Lois L. Winter	

**Email address changes:** Robert Arce      Gary Morgan

**Email address changes needed:** All these emails were returned as undeliverable.

Dave & Jean Abraham	Rita Beahan	Marjorie Berg	Alberto Beron
Armando R. Castillo	Betty R. Coffey	Terry Colin	Tom Everton
Joan Faskin-Johnson	Nancy Feltman	Marjorie Hawkins	Hitoshi Kajihara
Marilyn Kauffman	Clara Kimbrough	Virginia Lawler	Clara Lawson
Norman Mallory	Lucie Marsh	Michael Meeks	Shelton Mehr
Johnna L. Morton	Mary Taylor-Par	Beverly Pearson	Richard Phelps
Steve Pollock	Robert Reynolds	Sharon Starr	William Thieman
Eliza Thomas	Susanne van Marion		

**And anyone else who does not get emails from us.**

## The Monitor, Autumn 2011



**Look for us on the Web at**

**<http://www.vcccdra.org>**

### **2011-2012 Executive Board**

**Harry Culotta, President**

**Pat Gage, Treasurer**

**René G. Rodriguez, Past President**

**Gary Johnson, Benefits Committee Chair**

**Gary B. Morgan, Vice President**

**Don Medley, Membership Committee Chair**

**Marie Soo Hoo, Secretary**

**Larry Manson, Political Committee Chair**

**VCCCD Retirees' Association**  
**P.O. Box 6216**  
**Ventura, CA 93006-6216**

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