



Focus



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Tommy Thompson Speaks At WVHA Annual Meeting



The West Virginia Hospital Association's (WVHA) 79th Annual Meeting was held September 29 through October 1, 2004, at The Greenbrier. This year's meeting, themed *Creating The Future While Managing The Present*, began with a keynote presentation by U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) Tommy Thompson.

As part of his keynote address to hospital and healthcare leaders from around the state, Thompson discussed the challenges that hospitals and the healthcare community will face in the years ahead and how the federal government is working with providers to improve the quality of life for all citizens. Thompson also officially announced a new organ donation initiative in West Virginia in collaboration with the WVHA, the state's four Organ Procurement Organizations (OPOs), and the state Department of Health and Human Resources (DHHR). The statewide, one-year project, *West Virginia Donation Initiative*, is the first of its kind in the nation and represents the first time that an entire state has come together under the auspices of increasing organ donation rates.

The goal of the project is to further engage hospitals in a directed strategy to increase donation rates in West Virginia to 75 percent. Thompson cited Cabell Huntington and St. Mary's hospitals, both in Huntington, as exemplary in their donation efforts. Wheeling Hospital has been identified as a donation champion. Thompson called on all hospitals to pledge to work cooperatively with their designated OPOs to reach the

donation rate.

About 86,000 Americans are waiting for lifesaving organs; 17 people on the waiting list die each day for lack of available organs. Approximately every 15 minutes another person joins the waiting list.

Thompson Addresses Healthcare Issues

Thompson addressed two other important issues in healthcare at the Annual Meeting: technology and prevention. The Secretary called on the state's hospitals to help *change the face of medicine* through a better and integrated system of health technology. He noted that hospitals still operate on technology from the 1920s, i.e., manila folders, and urged a system that invests in 21st Century technology. He said that technology such as electronic medical records would not only benefit physicians, nurses and pharmacists, but patients as well. Such initiatives would ultimately lead to improved efficiency and a reduction in medical errors.

Thompson also called on hospitals to help transform medicine by advancing initiatives to change lifestyle, particularly prevention in the area of tobacco use, diabetes and obesity. The Secretary said that costs associated with these illnesses are placing an enormous burden on the healthcare system, even more evident in West Virginia as it tops the lists on those illnesses. He called on hospitals to be *part of the answer* by initiating early medical testing programs and further encouraging exercise and nutrition.

Since becoming U.S. Secretary in 2001, Thompson has called on closer integration of health policy and foreign policy with the aim of improving the lives of vulnerable populations and serving the

country's best interests. Along with the key priorities mentioned above, he remains passionate about dealing with the problem of the uninsured and ensuring that the public health community, including the nation's hospitals, increases its level of preparedness.

Medicare and Obesity



A recent West Virginia Hospital Association (WVHA) Web site poll shows that of 117 respondents, 87, or 74.4 percent believe that Medicaid should be expanded to cover dietetic and consultation services to help fight obesity; a total of 30, or 25.6 percent do not support such measures.

Investment in preventive measures would be money well spent, according to WVHA President and CEO Steven Summer. "Medicaid is paying as much for obesity as it is for tobacco use," Summer stated. "Obesity has led to a high rate of juvenile diabetes in the state and the country, leading to the need for parents to be active role models for health behavior."

Poll participants mirror the most recent opinions about obesity being expressed in Washington. U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Tommy Thompson recently announced that obesity is officially considered a disease, with Medicare, the largest government healthcare plan, paying for some treatments for overweight Americans.

Thompson told a Senate committee that Medicare, which covers retirees and the handicapped, will allow obesity to be treated as a disease in its own right. However, treatment, such as radical stomach bypass surgery, must be proven medically effective to be monetarily reimbursed.

The new Medicare coverage will remove barriers to covering anti-obesity interventions if scientific and medical evidence demonstrate their effectiveness in improving health outcomes of Medicare beneficiaries. The new policy is not expected to have an immediate impact on Medicare coverage. It does not affect the existing Medicare coverage of treatments of diseases resulting in or made worse by obesity, in particular currently covered surgical treatments for morbidly obese individuals. However, public requests for coverage make the new Medicare policy a work in progress.

In 2004, the Legislature passed *House Concurrent Resolution No. 8* requesting a joint committee on Government and Finance to conduct a study on childhood obesity in regards to chronic diseases, poor nutrition and inadequate exercise.

WV to Receive Rural Grants

Secretary Thompson announced at the West Virginia Hospital Association's 79th Annual Meeting three grants totaling over \$819,000 to improve the quality of healthcare for West Virginia families by the state's small rural hospitals.

"These grants will help rural hospitals provide better care, promote patient safety and research more effective ways to provide healthcare for West Virginia families," Thompson said. The grants include:

⇒ \$485,700 to the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources (DHHR) under the Rural Hospital Flexibility Program, which helps small hospitals improve their financial and clinical operations while helping them be licensed as Critical Access Hospitals (CAH), which have 25 or fewer beds. CAHs receive cost-based reimbursements from Medicare for acute inpatient and outpatient

services. This grant also encourages the development of health networks and helps improve emergency medical services in rural areas.

⇒ \$183,920 to the West Virginia DHHR under the Small Rural Hospital Improvement Grant Program, which will help small rural West Virginia hospitals improve quality of care and patient safety by making investments in computers, software and technical assistance. Hospitals with 49 or fewer beds are eligible for this grant.

⇒ \$149,767 to the West Virginia University Research Corp. under the Rural Health Services Research Program, which will pay for one-year studies that research how social factors, organization structures, financing systems and personal behavior affect access to healthcare, quality of care and cost of care in rural communities.

Supreme Court Race 2004



The West Virginia Hospital Political Action Committee (HOSPAC) has focused its attention upon the November general election. Among the most important areas is the West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals race.

The race is critical because the current makeup of the Supreme Court will be very problematic if the healthcare community is not able to sustain the medical liability reforms of House Bill 2122 passed by the Legislature in 2003. Healthcare and business leaders have a built-in common bond of protecting this nationally recognized medical liability reform legislation, as well as overcoming prior years' hurdles of helping create a more business friendly judicial climate for all of West Virginia.

The healthcare field and business community in West Virginia have united to support Charleston defense lawyer Brent Benjamin for a seat on the Supreme Court. Benjamin runs opposite incumbent Warren McGraw, a known opponent of medical liability reform in the physician and business communities. McGraw has voted twice to strike down the previous \$1 million cap on non-economic damages that was in place prior to the passage of medical liability reform in 2003. Since the passage of the new legislation, McGraw has voted three times to hear cases aimed at weakening the new reform.

Minnie Hamilton Health Center: A Model Rural Health Program

The National Advisory Committee on Rural Health and Human Services (NACRHHS) has recognized Minnie Hamilton Health Center in Grantsville as a model rural health program in its 2004 report to Health and Human Services (HHR) Secretary Tommy Thompson. Minnie Hamilton Health Center is one of 14 critical access hospitals in West Virginia.

"The Minnie Hamilton Health Center," reads the report, "which the Committee visited in September, demonstrates the power of community commitment to local healthcare. The Center has made capital improvements and expanded to offer day care, ambulance transport, mental and oral health services, school-based health clinics and physical therapy.

"It also operates a 24-bed, long-term care facility that enables Calhoun County seniors to remain in their home community. Altogether, the Center employs 180 individuals, making it the second largest employer in Calhoun County and an important contributor to its economic base."

The report continued its praise of Minnie Hamilton, stating, "the Committee noted that the Center has also successfully integrated its healthcare and human services delivery. The Center works with the Calhoun County Committee on Aging (CCCOA). Health center outreach employees conduct a senior citizens wellness program that provides health information and fitness counseling to area seniors.

The Center also used a portion of a Community-Based Initiatives grant to construct a walking trail for senior citizens. CCCOA reaches out to elderly residents of the Center's Long-Term Care Unit and includes them in committee activities such as shopping trips and travel opportunities."

Minnie Hamilton Health Center CEO Barbara Lay views their close community outreach as nothing more than a typical aspect of the local culture in this rural West Virginia community.

"People in Calhoun County have an innate ability to care for one another, and we see that here every day," Lay said.

St. Mary's Receives HR Award

St. Mary's Medical Center has been recognized by Jobsience, a national Internet healthcare applicant tracking provider, for its innovative approach in human resources. Jennifer Gore, a nurse recruiter at St. Mary's, was recognized for her submission of the *Mommy Hours* program, which helps registered nurses who have been raising children to begin employment again in a family-friendly manner. With this program, mothers have the option to tailor their work schedules to begin work after their children go to school and end work before their children return home. The program was developed in response to the national nursing shortage.

St. Mary's ranked as one of the top four facilities in the nation who were runners-up for this year's *Innovation Prize*.

Jobsience operates the largest network of medical specialty career sites in North America and provides systems for managing recruiting, JCAHO compliance and hospital shifts.

Jefferson Memorial 's History

This year Jefferson Memorial Hospital celebrates its centennial. As part of its commemoration, Jefferson Memorial Hospital, formerly known as Charles Town General Hospital, has announced the publication of *The Big Yellow House on Congress Street: A Beacon of Hope*. The coffee table book celebrates the rich history of Charles Town and Ranson in the 1920s and 1930s and the establishment of Charles Town General Hospital.

The *Big Yellow House*, written by Carl J. Post, Ph.D., is available at locations throughout Jefferson County, including the new Visitor's Center located on George Street across from the Court House. All proceeds of the book, which sells for \$30.00, will benefit The Jefferson Health Care Foundation, The Jefferson County Historical Society, and the American Public University Foundation.

The original location for Charles Town General Hospital, the Big Yellow House was established in 1904 when South Carolina native Dr. Richard Edmondston Venning agreed to convert the second floor of his home located on West Congress Street in Charles Town.

In 1948, the house became a successful nursing home until 1996, when it became home to the online American Public University System. Today Jefferson Memorial thrives on South Preston Street in Ranson with CEO John Sherwood at the helm.

- Hospital News**
- ⇒ Lisa Leach, CEO of Sistersville General Hospital, has resigned and taken a position with the Mid Ohio Valley Rural Health Alliance, effective Oct 29.
 - ⇒ Don Muhlenthaler has been appointed CEO of Pocahontas Memorial Hospital.
 - ⇒ Kevin Halter has resigned as COO of Bluefield Regional Medical Center.
 - ⇒ Albert Pilkington III of Greenville, KY, has been appointed President and CEO of Fairmont General Hospital.
 - ⇒ Robert Harman, CHE, CEO of Grant Memorial Hospital has been named the *Dean of CEOs* by *Modern Healthcare* magazine in recognition of his nearly 40-year tenure at Grant Memorial.

CEOs

Physician Assistants Day

October 6, 2004, was National Physician Assistants (PA) Day, with the profession being celebrated throughout October 12.

What do PAs do? Today's PA works as part of the physician

team, regardless of the setting in which they work. PAs are healthcare professionals licensed to practice medicine with physician supervision. As part of their comprehensive responsibilities, PAs conduct physical exams, diagnose and treat illnesses, order and interpret tests, counsel on preventative healthcare issues, assist in surgery, and have prescriptive privileges.

While PAs work in a variety of settings from college campuses to individual physician offices to rural health clinics, many work in hospitals. In fact, Dan Lauffer, FACHE, President and CEO, of Saint Francis Hospital, Charleston, and Putnam General Hospital, Hurricane, began his early medical training as a PA.

PAs are trained in intensive education programs accredited by the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant. Within West Virginia, there are two accredited programs, one at Alderson-Broadus College and one at Mountain State University. To access the free job listing service through the West Virginia, visit www.wvapa.com.



Governor Wise and West Virginia Association of Physician Assistants met at the Capitol when he declared October 6 PA Day.

October is National Breast Cancer Awareness Month!

For the last 20 years, members of the National Breast Cancer Awareness Month have been working collectively to Pass the Word throughout the country that early detection of breast cancer saves lives. For more information, go to www.nbcam.org.