

Partnership aims to help uninsured

Patty Enrado, Contributing Editor

SAN JOSE, CA – The Foundation of Health Care Education and Catholic Healthcare West have partnered to help with the health insurance enrollment process for uninsured Americans who are unaware of their eligibility for government programs.

By enrolling them online or when they visit a CHW facility, the large healthcare system hopes to reduce unnecessary emergency department visits and reduce the cost of care.

“Our goal is to improve the overall quality of life in the communities we serve by both providing excellent care and by helping to ensure that those who are in need of care can access it,” said CHW spokeswoman Tricia Griffin.

CHW hospitals treated 177,377 uninsured individuals spread over 1.3 million visits for a total cost of \$157 million in 2008, she said.

Using FHCE’s database of government-sponsored programs, CHW helps eligible patients get enrolled and posts links to Medicaid and Medicare insurance information on its Web site. CHW also directs uninsured patients to FHCE’s helpline and Web site.

Of the 47 million uninsured, more than one-third are eligible for public programs but don’t know they’re eligible, said Ankeny Minoux, FHCE’s president.

“It’s vitally important that uninsured Americans know if they’re eligible for public programs,” said Robert Zirkelbach, spokesman for the America’s Health Insurance Plans.

In its healthcare reform proposal, AHIP calls on states to work with health plans in a public/private collaboration to make health insurance information accessible for everyone, he said. While collaboration exists, it needs to be expanded, he said.

“The Pathway to Covering America,” the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association’s healthcare reform proposal, addresses the three groups composing the uninsured – the “squeezed out,” “missing out” and “opt out.”

“Blue Cross and Blue Shield companies are already working within their local communities to ensure those ‘missing out’ receive coverage,” said Alissa Fox, senior vice president. “Because the Blues collectively cover 102 million Americans, we feel it’s imperative to collaborate with other stakeholders to find solutions that reduce the number of uninsured.”

Blues plans are working with states to enroll eligible individuals for Medicaid or the State Children’s Health Insurance Programs, as well as establishing outreach stations in the community, advertising in local media and helping beneficiaries with their paperwork.

In addition to its work with FCHE, CHW helped develop the Healthy San Francisco program and developed the Access to Healthcare Network in Nevada and MercyCare Plan in Arizona, Griffin said.

FCHE is in talks with other healthcare systems in California and in Florida to implement a similar program, said Minoux. “Groups all have their own niche to help out with the uninsured,” she said.