A Message From the Director

Our celebration of the Innovation Project (see to the right) was one of the best events I have been to since coming to Los Angeles. The event highlighted the 16 projects that received grant funding to improve the care our patients receive and also recognized four special luminary winners.

The Department's Strategic Plan set out in January 2011 called for engaging our frontline staff on ways to make DHS better. I have always believed that the people who know best how to improve care are on the frontline delivering it. The Innovation Project exceeded all expectations with 260 applications from groups and individuals wanting to put their know-how to use.

In addition to engaging frontline staff, the Innovation Project was an important collaborative endeavor between SEIU 721 and DHS. It showed how unions and staff can work together to make meaningful improvements in the care of our patients. For example, as a primary care doctor, I can’t tell you how many times I have seen patients with medical complications or bad reactions due to taking medications incorrectly. This is not their fault! When you are on multiple medications, each with different schedules of administration, it is easy to get confused. So, of course, I love that Mid Valley Comprehensive Health Center is giving their patients pill boxes to help them take their medicines correctly. But more broadly, I am so happy to see leadership and frontline staff to work thinking together to design projects that would make DHS better for patients. “The best ideas always come from the frontline,” said DHS director Dr. Mitchell Katz. “Everyone should come to work thinking about how to improve care to our patients, and these projects show that you can make a difference.”

A total of 260 applications for funding were received from DHS facilities, but just 16 were selected to receive grant funding. Of those 16, four were singled out as “luminaries” for exemplifying labor and management partnership projects across DHS.

Luminary programs included a Harbor-UCLA hand hygiene compliance campaign, a Coastal Health Centers art program to create more child and family-friendly care environments, a Mid-Valley clinic program to increase medication adherence through pill organizers and small totes, and Rancho’s program to create real-life work opportunities for occupational therapy patients.

“Luminaries” for exemplifying labor and management partnership projects included:

- A staff member at Mid-Valley Comprehensive Health Center helps a patient understand her daily pill regimen with the use of pill organizers.
- A patient at Rancho Los Amigos participates in the OT Works Enterprises program which creates real life work opportunities for those with physical disabilities.
- A staff consultant at your organization helps design projects that would make DHS better for patients.
- “The positive impact the Enterprises program has had on our patients defies words,” says Deshaies. “They gain self-esteem, confidence, and a sense of purpose and belonging which helps them take the next step toward community reintegration.”

The award ceremony marked the official conclusion of the Innovation Project, a collaboration between DHS and SEIU 721 that encouraged management and frontline staff to work together to improve patient care.

Frontline Staff and Managers Walk Innovation Red Carpet

By Michael Wilson

Every day Rancho Los Amigos occupational therapist Lisa Deshaies sees the benefits of therapy on patients recovering from injury. So when she and colleagues heard about a grant project funding innovation, they saw a chance to grow a small investment into an inspirational fortune. The result is Rancho Works Enterprises, a program that creates real life work opportunities in building, photography, handicrafts and more for patients to regain skills and earn a living.

This and three other highly innovative projects across DHS were specially recognized by the Board of Supervisors last month as clinical frontline staff joined department leaders and executives from the Blue Shield Foundation and California Endowment, which funded the projects raising the bar in care.

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A total of 260 applications for funding were received from DHS facilities, but just 16 were selected to receive grant funding. Of those 16, four were singled out as “luminaries” for exemplifying labor and management partnership projects. Luminary programs included a Harbor-UCLA hand hygiene compliance campaign, a Coastal Health Centers art program to create more child and family-friendly care environments, a Mid-Valley clinic program to increase medication adherence through pill organizers and small totes, and Rancho’s program to create real-life work opportunities for occupational therapy patients.

Innovation Project consultant Nicole Moore says the grant served as a catalyst for getting ideas out, funded, and brought to scale. She says the overall project was unique because anyone on the frontline could come up with ideas to improve DHS. “One of my favorite..."
Pharmacy Student Aims High

Long Beach Comprehensive Health Center assistant administrator Thy Banh has received a Los Angeles County STARs award and recognition from the Board of Supervisors for a project that enables clinic providers to code charts directly into the Affinity/Quantrim system. STARs is an acronym for Special Talents for Achieving Remarkable Service, a program established by the Board of Supervisors to acknowledge outstanding employees in the categories of fiscal sustainability, service excellence/organizational effectiveness, and workforce excellence.

Banh’s project eliminated the need for encounter forms and scanning, thereby reducing the time needed to code charts into Affinity from three months to seven days across the Coastal health facilities.

“Thy always stands in my eyes, but I am happy to see that the County of Los Angeles and the Board of Supervisors are recognizing what an outstanding employee she is,” said clinic administrator Donna Nagsoa. “She truly is a person of Special Talents for Achieving Remarkable Service and I am extremely proud and fortunate to have her part of my team.”

Project benefits include the ability to track provider productivity on a weekly basis, automation of Continuous Quality Improvement data, increased chart availability, and estimated savings of $69,000 per year. It is the first DHS STARs win in any category since December 2010.

Pharmacy Student Aims High

By Michael Wilson

Nogie Demirijian could have taken it easy in the weeks before graduating from Western University College of Pharmacy. Instead, the top ranked student in his class, a degree in Molecular Biology from UCLA took a 16-week advanced research elective in the DHS Office of Pharmacy Affairs where he led a project looking at ways to assess sterile compounding to improve medication safety within DHS hospitals.

DHS Pharmacy Affairs routinely provides opportunities for pharmacy students from both the USC School of Pharmacy and Western University to participate in onsite rotations that provide the opportunity to analyze and help implement healthcare system medication management improvements.

Sterile compounding refers to the process where pharmacists mix medications for patients. While pills are mass-produced by pharmaceutical companies under regulation by the FDA, there are many medications given to hospitalized patients, like IV drips, that need to be diluted or put into a solution in the hospital’s process of sterile compounding by a trained pharmacist.

To be done safely, sterile compounding must occur in a defined environment. There are both federal USP 797 and state regulations, and these sets of standards may differ. Demirijian looked at variations between the California Board of Pharmacy regulations and the United States Pharmacopeia Chapter 797, or USP <797>. He conducted sterile compounding to find variations and strengthen compounding procedures in DHS hospitals.

The high risks associated with sterile compounding gained national media attention after a deadly outbreak caused nearly 50 deaths nationwide and over 700 patients were infected, and have ongoing illness.

“Right now it’s one of the most important things in our profession because of what happened in New England and the grave harm that came to patients as a result of pharmacy practice,” says DHS pharmacy supervisor Kim Le, who oversees the project. The first phase involved doing a ‘crosswalk analysis’ between state pharmacy law and the federal standard USP <797> to identify variations. Next, a single DHS hospital was examined to determine compliance with each of those standards. The final phase involved assigning a readiness tool and risk score for DHS hospitals in areas of standards noncompliance.

The crosswalk analysis was shared with the California Board of Pharmacy and utilized to identify areas where the Board might strengthen regulatory standards in new regulations. As part of this DHS rotation, Demirijian attended the State Board of Pharmacy Compounding Committee meeting where his crosswalk was highlighted. In addition, other state organizations expressed interest in the crosswalk and are using this DHS-developed tool to improve their sterile compounding processes.

Demirijian says the rotation has confirmed his preference for the patient care aspect of pharmacy rather than pharmacology lab work. While improving a single patient’s care or experience is rewarding, he says the opportunity he gained in DHS to pursue both the administrative and clinical aspects of health system pharmacy practice, and make changes that affect hundreds of thousands of patients, is unparalleled.