

**Harris County Medical Society**  
**Medicaid Forum**  
**Wednesday, October 5, 2005**  
**Submitted by: Tiffany Biason**

**I. Immunization Registry**

A "Memorandum of Understanding" document, which transfers ownership of the Houston-Harris County Immunization Registry to the Houston Department of Health and Human Services, was signed and approved. The transfer of ownership from private to public domain allows the registry to link with the state registry. In the event of a natural disaster that displaces and threatens the health of Houston residents, the ability to access the registry can facilitate the process of administering vaccinations to those who have not been immunized.

**II. Waiver for Katrina evacuees**

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services approved a waiver to ensure that Katrina evacuees in Texas continue to have access to health care services. The state will implement the waiver in two phases. In Phase I (9/24/05-9/30/05), all evacuees from a declared disaster area are eligible for coverage, and Medicaid AND non-Medicaid providers are eligible for reimbursement. In Phase II (10/1/05-6/30/05), the Texas Health and Human Services Commission will enroll evacuees into this program if the family's or individual's income is at or below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level. Other factors are also considered. **Only enrolled Medicaid providers are eligible for reimbursement.** Most likely, there will be a separate waiver plan for Rita evacuees.

**III. Emergency Health Care Relief Act**

Finance Committee Chairman Charles Grassley (R-IA) and Ranking Member Max Baucus (D-MT) introduced the "Emergency Health Care Relief Act of 2005" to address the health and long-term services needs of Hurricane Katrina survivors and affected states. In this bill is a provision specifically applicable to low-income people with disabilities and their families called Disaster Relief Medicaid (DRM). DRM provides coverage for low-income residents or evacuees from the hardest hit counties in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. Under the Emergency Health Care Relief Act, Louisiana, Mississippi and counties under disaster declaration in Alabama will receive **100 percent federal funding** for their Medicaid programs from August 28, 2005 through December 31, 2006.

**IV. Texas Health Steps**

Texas Health Steps is an important Medicaid benefit that provides in depth healthcare for children from birth until their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, including developmental screenings, physical examinations, immunizations, and health education. As of 9/1/05, the developmental screening policy and periodicity has been changed and standardized. The new policy requires specific developmental milestones to be tested when children are a particular age.

**V. Synagis Update**

An infusion company called Alliance informed physicians that it could no longer provide Synagis injections for Medicaid patients in their clinics. Synagis is a vaccine given to infants at risk for developing Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV). Since the drug is costly to administer, many physicians refer Medicaid patients to clinics such as those managed by Alliance to receive the shots. The Health and Human Services Commission is working on an alternate system in which physicians can request Synagis via the vendor drug program. The drug would be provided at no cost to the physicians.

**VI. Medicaid Expansion Update**

Two health plans, Health Maintenance Organization (HMO) and Primary Care Case Management (PCCM), are available under the Medicaid Managed Care Program (STAR). However, hospitals in Harris County will be converted to a HMO "carve out" model and begin phasing out the PCCM health plan. Hospital payments are excluded from the HMO capitated premium, and that the county can access UPL dollars.

**VII. Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) update**

Texas Children's Health Plan, Inc announced new prior authorization procedures for its Medicaid clients. For TCHP individual product, CHIP, and STAR members, the following services no longer require prior authorization: outpatient/ambulatory surgeries; physical, speech, and occupational therapy; CT scans and MRIs; Hospice; Nutritional counseling; and hearing aids.