

California and National News



Premature Births Increasing: Premature births are defined as being prior to the 37th week of gestation. About 13 percent of births in the U.S. are premature, representing over half a million premature babies per year, which is an increase of 30 percent since 1985. Although infertility patients have swollen the ranks of multiple births, which are more likely to be born prematurely, 83 percent of premature births are singletons. Preterm babies account for over a third of all infant deaths and cost \$27 billion a year. While the ability of neonatology to achieve survival of many of these prematures has advanced, many of them are permanently disabled and, over their lifetimes, add significantly to our nation's huge medical expenditures.

Walk-In Clinics: Several hundred walk-in clinics have opened in national pharmacies and retail stores such as Wal-Mart, CVS Pharmacies, and Longs Drug Stores. These clinics function without a physician on-site as they are staffed with nurse practitioners and physician assistants who treat illnesses and even prescribe medications. These clinics are attractive to the uninsured and underinsured, are conveniently located, have minimal waiting times, and can be less expensive than physician offices. California regulations affecting clinic ownership and staffing, as well as the high cost of operating a business here, have curbed the spread of such entities in this state. California's ban on the corporate practice of medicine mandates that these clinics be owned and operated by licensed healthcare professionals. California also requires one supervising physician (who is usually off-site and communicates as needed via phone) for four nurse practitioners and two physician assistants. They well may be taking business away from primary care physicians whose practices already are on the verge of fiscal collapse. Moreover, these clinics would be expected to have an increased likelihood to misdiagnose or fail to diagnose serious illnesses that would have been captured by a patient's PCP (with an ongoing relationship). There are loopholes that permit such clinics to skirt the regulations, such as San Ramon-based Wellness-Express: clinics are set up under a separate physician-owned company that contracts with firms to operate and manage these clinics. *From Randy Pench, Sacramento Bee: America Online, November 7, 2006.*

Synthetic Trees as Massive Carbon Dioxide Absorbers: Carbon dioxide absorption is not limited to anesthesia machines. Carbon sequestration is capturing and storing CO₂ by technological means. It has been spawned by efforts to control global warming by decreasing greenhouse gases such as CO₂.

Synthetic trees 300 feet high and 180 feet wide extract CO₂ using liquid sodium hydroxide, which then is converted to sodium carbonate, the carbon of which can be extracted and turned into a concentrated form ready for underground burial. Each of these “trees” could absorb 90,000 tons of CO₂ each year, which is the equivalent of the yearly exhaust of 15,000 automobiles.

California Health Care Premiums Catch Up With National Costs: Premiums for single HMO coverage in California (birthplace of managed care) for the first time have caught up with the national average for employer-sponsored health insurance. Health insurance premiums rose 8.7 percent in 2006, compared to a 4.2 percent increase in the overall California inflation rate. California workers paid \$547 annually for single coverage and \$3,824 for family coverage. *California Health Care Foundation, November 29, 2006.*

Call for Submission of Resolutions to the House of Delegates

Any CSA member may submit a resolution to the House of Delegates (your elected representatives) on any issue that you deem important. The deliberations pursuant to these resolutions influence the course of action of the CSA during the ensuing year. For assistance in formulating a resolution, you are welcome to contact Linda B. Hertzberg, M.D., Speaker of the House of Delegates.

The House of Delegates will meet on Saturday, June 2, 2007, as part of the Annual Meeting of the CSA/UCSD at the Sheraton San Diego Hotel & Marina, San Diego, California. A reference committee meets Friday evening to hear testimony on all matters to be considered by the House. For more information, contact the CSA office (650) 345-3020, (800) 345-3691, fax (650) 345-3269.

The deadline for submissions is April 1, 2007.