

Commonwealth Care, Medicaid patients urged to switch plans

By Eliot Baker
 I&M Staff Writer

Nantucket Cottage Hospital is urging all islanders whose Commonwealth Care or MassHealth (Medicaid) health insurance is administered by BMC HealthNet to change their health plan immediately during the open enrollment period of May 25 through June 25 following its decision to not renew their BMC HealthNet contract, which will expire June 30.

The hospital intends to reach all of the estimated 1,000 to 1,200 affected islanders during the open enrollment period. It should be relatively simple to switch over to one of the two accepted health plans, Network Health or Neighborhood Health Plan. Those still with BMC coverage after June 30 will remain covered for emergency services, said NCH social services director Peter McKay.

"It takes about 10 to 15 minutes, max, to switch over," said McKay. "It doesn't cost anything to switch."

Under the new agreement, patients may still opt for affordable state health insurance through Network Health or

Neighborhood Health Plan. These plans allow patients to continue seeing their local doctors while letting them seek off-island care at facilities such as NCH affiliate Mass General Hospital, and most other hospitals between the Cape and Boston.

"BMC will not be contracted with NCH and four of the (five NCH primary care providers), but they will most likely have continued contracts with other physicians, many who come to the island on a regular consulting basis," said NCH community relations coordinator Kate Splaine, who noted that the details behind the decision to not renew the contract were privileged. "Converting to another plan (Network Health or Neighborhood Health) will keep coverage with NCH and our PCPs but may not provide coverage for these other physicians."

Hospital officials said NCH will do everything possible to ensure patients' health insurance coverage continues without interruption. Anyone covered under Mass Health or Commonwealth Care should call NCH

healthcare advocates Kathy Butterworth at (508) 825-8387 or Alex Madden at (508) 825-8256.

"Our goal is that we have continuous good, reliable options," said McKay, adding that the NCH healthcare advocates will be joined by MGH enrollment specialists to meet patient demand. Together, they will field questions and concerns May 25 to June 25, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

McKay said it's vital that word spreads about the change in insurance coverage. NCH is unable to reach every affected islander since no BMC patient master list exists. They are counting on the community to spread the word in addition to their own in-hospital efforts.

State health insurance is administered through four intermediaries in Massachusetts: Network Health, Neighborhood Health Plan, BMC HealthNet and Fallon Community, according to McKay. McKay said that NCH has always offered two options, and will thus be adding Neighborhood Health as they drop BMC HealthNet.

