

State insurance plan options will change

The next five weeks provide an important window of opportunity for current and prospective Island members of Commonwealth Care, the subsidized state health insurance plan enacted to provide universal access to insurance coverage for all Massachusetts citizens.

Beginning May 25 and extending through June 25, current members may change health insurance plans for any reason. This is particularly important for Islanders now covered by the Boston Medical Center (BMC) program, one of several nonprofit managed care organizations approved by the state's Health Connector, the agency that administers the state insurance plan.

Currently, BMC and Network Health both have contracts with Martha's Vineyard Hospital. A new provider will enter the Vineyard market next month. Neighborhood Health has signed a contract with the hospital, effective July 1.

Martha's Vineyard Hospital has told the state it plans to end its contract with BMC on June 30, after which it would no longer accept that insurance plan.

Dick Powers, director of public affairs for Commonwealth Connector, told The Times there

would be a "multi-prong effort" made to inform residents of the changes. These will include a letter that informs all Commonwealth Care members that BMC is no longer available and outlines the new options. Commonwealth Care will also send an information packet during the open enrollment period to all members in June.

Mr. Powers said the hospital would also send a letter to all patients advising that it would no longer accept BMC. State regulations allow hospital officials to say little about the changes.

Tim Walsh, hospital chief executive officer, said the decision to end the contract with BMC will not eliminate health insurance options for former BMC members, who will be able to select either Network Health or Neighborhood Health. He said that unlike these two plans, BMC makes it difficult for Island patients to transfer to member hospitals of the Partners HealthCare System, to which the Vineyard hospital belongs.

Mr. Walsh said the new state plan has been a great benefit to the hospital, which previously lost money providing health care to uninsured patients and residents who could not afford insurance. "It brings stability," he said.

For more information, call Martha's Vineyard Hospital at 508-693-0410, or refer to www.mahealthconnector.org.

