

Weekly Medical Directors Briefing January 25-29, 2021

**“The tragedy of life is not found in failure, but
complacency.”**

-Benjamin Mays

This Week's News

New Information on Highly Infectious COVID-19 Strains

In the past week, there has been a flurry of new information about different COVID-19 strains. With large-scale community transmission, new strains can spread widely, and the most infectious strains will become more prevalent than less infectious strains over time. New information will continue to become available in the days and weeks ahead. Here is a summary of highlights:

CAL.20C: California has its [own highly infectious strain of COVID-19](#), called CAL.20C which first appeared last summer in Los Angeles, but spread steadily since November, accounting for 30% of cases three weeks ago, and 50% of COVID-19 isolates two weeks ago in Los Angeles. This strain has now been found throughout California, including the Bay Area. Kaiser has identified it at all of their hospitals in Northern California.

This strain was incidentally discovered when California scientists began looking for the highly infectious British strain.

A laboratory director in Napa noted last week isolates of COVID-19 from community testing have much higher load of viruses in the samples than seen before in Napa. This is consistent with the mechanism for higher infectivity of these strains, which is that more virus is shed when people are infectious. Sequencing confirmation is pending, but this suggests that a more infectious strain is rapidly spreading in Northern California in larger numbers. This means that we may be looking at accelerated spread in our region in the month to come.

In the next few weeks, we will learn steadily more about this CAL.20C strain and its role in the notable big surge in COVID-19 cases in California, Arizona, and Nevada, starting in November. Specifically, we need data on mortality rates, effectiveness of vaccines, degree of increased infectiousness, and pattern of spread through the state.

B.1.1.7: On Friday, the [UK government announced](#) that early data suggests that the **British** variant (B.1.1.7), already known to be about 50% more infectious, may have a 30% higher mortality rate than the previous COVID-19 circulating in the UK. In the UK, this means an increase in overall mortality rate from about 1.0% to about 1.3%, still far below the mortality of coronaviruses that caused SARS in 2003 or MERS in 2012.

Early studies have [confirmed Moderna vaccine effectiveness](#) against the B.1.1.7 variant.

501Y.V2: This strain, circulating widely in **South Africa**, has [decreased cross-reactivity to convalescent plasma](#) and monoclonal antibodies. Today, [Moderna announced](#) that the immune response to their vaccine was somewhat less strong against 501Y.V2 than the original Wuhan strain that their vaccine is based on. We don't know how much less clinical effectiveness (in terms of actual prevention of infection) that this translates to, but Moderna has developed a new version of their vaccine targeting this strain that it is planning on testing as a booster dose, after the original 2 dose series is completed.

P1: A [new strain](#) with over 20 mutations has been identified in Manaus, **Brazil** has exploded in December, 2020, even in a community which was [devastated by a 60-70% infection rate in April, 2020](#), enough that should have generated herd immunity of the original COVID-19 strain. This raises concerns of widespread re-infection when strains of COVID-19 are sufficiently different, and makes it more likely that vaccines will be less effective against this strain. It will be weeks before we know more details.

Implications of Increased Infectiousness of COVID-19: France and Germany decided that cloth masks are not sufficient to counter spread of more infectious strains. Germany is now requiring N95, KN95, FFP2, or surgical masks, and specifically not cloth masks, for people interacting in public (like grocery stores and public transit). The original push for homemade cloth masks came from a desire to save scarce N95 masks and other masks for doctors, nurses, paramedics, doctor's offices, etc. It is doubtful that the global supply chain for N95 masks can meet the demand to have the entire population wear them, but KN95 masks are more readily available. Absent these medical grade masks, some are calling for wearing two cloth masks, one on top of the other, to decrease risk of infection.

To increase protection against these more infectious strains, in addition to possible future changes in mask recommendations, the CDC may alter their recommendations around physical distancing. In the meantime, it might be prudent to consider a higher standard (such as 9 feet and 5 minutes instead of 6 feet and 15 minutes), in your health care settings.

PHC Achieves NCQA Accreditation

Partnership HealthPlan of California (PHC) was notified today that the National Council on Quality Assurance (NCQA) has issued full health plan accreditation to PHC. We are very proud of this achievement.

In about two years, NCQA will additionally rate PHC based on the results of our annual clinical quality (HEDIS) and member experience (CAHPS) surveys. The scale ranges from zero to five. Scores of four and higher are considered above average. In the years to come, we will be working to maintain our excellent standards of accreditation while working with you to support steady improvement in clinical quality and customer experience, across our entire region.



Spring 2021 PHC Regional Medical Directors Meeting

Biannually, PHC hosts a regional meeting with clinical leaders for primary care organizations. Due to the need to stay socially distanced, we will be hosting this event virtually. We are currently in the early stages of planning for this event and will be releasing more information over the next few months.

A few topics that we will cover are:

- PHC Updates, New Programs, Major Policy Changes, and COVID-19
- Other topics include Major Pharmacy Changes, Formulary Highlights, Clinical Updates, mental health & Substance use Disorder Treatment, Data Review: Opioid Use, Vaccination, Readmission, PCP-QIP Changes, Special Initiatives, Prop 56 incentive programs and more.

Agenda:

Time	Agenda Item
9 a.m. – 10:50 a.m.	Main meeting
10:50 a.m. – 11 a.m.	Break
11 a.m. – 11:50 a.m.	Breakout sessions
11:50 a.m. – Noon	Break
Noon – 1 p.m.	Main meeting

Date: Friday, May 21, 2021

Time: 9 a.m. – 1 p.m.

[Sign-up Now](#) (Please specify your county in the County/Region field)

Medication Safe Storage

Recognizing safe storage is an important element to addressing misuse and abuse of controlled substances, especially in houses with teenagers and other adults. With this, it is important to provide education, and access, to our populations about the importance of medication safe storage.

Gatekeeper Innovation, Inc. has introduced a locking mechanism for these prescriptions. This device has a built in combination number lock, to help keep controlled substances safe from those who don't need the access.

Where can patients obtain these locking devices for their controlled prescriptions? Costco, Kaiser, Walgreens, Albertsons/Safeway, and Raley's.

Is this a covered benefit for PHC or Medi-Cal Members? Not at this time. However, it is available at a low cost and can be attached to filled prescriptions.

Resources:

- [Gatekeeper Safe Storage Overview](#)

CMSP Loan Repayment Program

The County Medical Services Program (CMSP) Governing Board is continuing its partnership with the Office of Statewide Health Planning & Development's Healthcare Workforce Development Division, to offer educational loan repayments to health professionals of up to \$50,000 in exchange for two-years of service at a CMSP-contracted provider site. Up to \$2 million will be awarded this year.

Applications will be accepted from January 04, 2021 – March 04, 2021.

[Check Eligibility](#)

[Apply Now](#)

[More Information](#)

Oxygen Saturation Monitors, BP Monitors, and Thermometers – No Cost for PHC Members

In response to COVID-19, PHC is providing blood pressure monitors, oxygen saturation monitors, and thermometers to be given at no cost to PHC members. PHC would like your help in getting these supplies distributed to our members and your patients who would benefit from this medical equipment.

Interested providers will need to complete the DME Request Form on our [website](#). Complete the form and submit to request@partnershiphp.org or fax to (707) 420-7855.

Providers will be expected to connect with the selected PHC members to ensure the member can use the equipment properly.

PHC Educational Opportunities and Events

Management of Depression in 2021: An Update

CME credit is pending for review.

As a result of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic and its consequent social and economic turmoil, a mental health crisis looms, of which depression is projected to be a major part. Therefore, there is perhaps no better time to review treatment of depression than now. Depression treatment has advanced in the past decade, and this webinar will focus in particular on psychopharmacological advances in the treatment of this critically important mood disorder.

Who should attend this webinar? Health care providers in primary medical clinics throughout the PHC network.

Date: Friday, January 29, 2021

Time: Noon – 1 p.m.

[Sign-up Now](#)

Questions? Contact Continuing Education Program Coordinator Liezel Lago at (707) 720-2736 or llago@partnershiphp.org.

Pediatric Screening for Elevated Lead Levels

California passed a new law and a new regulation enhancing the role of Medi-Cal Managed Care Plans in overseeing compliance with lead screening regulations. Dr. Moore will provide an overview on the health effects of mild and severe lead exposures, with a review of best practices and new regulatory requirements in the state of California.

To help with facilitation of the webinar, please submit any questions you may have by January 29 to esystemssupport@partnershiphp.org. We will do our best to answer your questions and will email a FAQ document to all attendees after the webinar. This webinar will be recorded for on-demand viewing.

Date: Wednesday, February 03, 2021

Time: Noon to 1 p.m.

[Sign-up Now](#)

Quality & Performance Improvement Training Events

For up-to-date events and trainings by the Quality and Performance Improvement Department, please view our [Quality Events Webpage](#).

Looking for more educational opportunities? The Quality & Performance Improvement Department has many pre-recorded, on-demand courses available to you. Trainings include:

- ABCs of Quality Improvement: An introduction to the basic principles of quality improvement.
- Accelerated Learning Educational Program: An overview of clinical measures including improvement strategies and tools.
- 2020 PCP QIP High Performers - How'd They Do That: Learn best practices from the 2019 PCP QIP high performers.

You can find these on-demand courses, and more, on our [Webinars Webpage](#).

Project Management 101 Webinar

[Flyer](#)

This two-session webinar is an introduction to the concepts and tools used in project management. Participants will learn project management principles and the tools used in each phase to manage projects successfully.

Project Management – Session 1 of 2

Objectives:

- Introduce the concepts and tools used in project management
- Learn project phases and processes
- Understand steps in framing and planning projects

Date: Wednesday, February 03, 2021

Time: Noon – 1:15 p.m.

[Sign-up Now](#)

Project Management – Session 2 of 2

Objectives:

- Apply concepts from Session 1 in a group activity
- Learn the key points in executing and monitoring projects
- Understand how to successfully close and transition projects

Date: Wednesday, February 10, 2021

Time: Noon – 1:15 p.m.

[Sign-up Now](#)

Engaging Patients in Quality Improvement Webinar

We are pleased to invite you to a webinar that will support your continued quality improvement skill development. This training session will introduce the concept of patient engagement in quality improvement with the goal to improve patient experience and health outcomes.

Participants will be able to:

- Explain why engaging patients in quality improvement is important.
- Describe several strategies to engage patients in improvement.
- Describe aspects of care that could be improved through the involvement of patients.

Date: Tuesday, March 30, 2021

Time: Noon – 1:15 p.m.

[Sign-up Now](#)

Recommended Educational Opportunities Outside of PHC

Diabetes Prevention Program (DPP)

This training is available for your patients with pre-diabetes. This Lifestyle Change Program is a free 1-year program proven to reduce risk of getting diabetes.

Starting Date: Wednesday, January 27, 2021

[Sign-up Now](#)

For more information:

(707) 638-5970

Maya.ramsey2@tu.edu

CSAM State of the Art Addiction Medicine Available Online

Earn up to 17.25 AMA PRA Category 1 Credits™ and 16.25 MOC credits!

The California Society of Addiction Medicine (CSAM) brings together national experts to share frontiers of research, treatments, and policies in the field of Addiction Medicine. This conference covers expansion of treatment into correctional health, hospital consultation services, emergency rooms, and even across the Border. It will cover how, despite the pandemic, telehealth can reach those who are isolated. It will address the worrisome trends in fentanyl, methamphetamine, tobacco and benzodiazepines use; legalization of cannabis, treatment updates for youth, cannabis and alcohol in pregnant women; and novel treatments such as non-

benzodiazepines for alcohol withdrawal and psychedelics for substance use disorders.

The activity consists of 22 lectures that were presented live (virtually) on September 22-25, 2020.

Member Rate: \$345

Non-Member Rate: \$495

[More Information](#)
[Registration](#)

Time: 9 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Training Fees: \$300 per attendee

[Sign-up Now](#)