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Today's News Tuesday, July 01, 2008**Med Mal Hike Reprieve?**

With Insurance Superintendent Eric Dinallo's announcement yesterday that he would hold off on announcing 2008-09 medical malpractice insurance rates, hopes rose that some legislative reforms are still alive. Many observers expect the Legislature to return in July or August to work on some outstanding proposals. Donna Montaldo, president of the New York chapter of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, believes that incoming Majority Leader Dean Skelos will be pushing for a measure to avert a double-digit increase. "He comes from Long Island, where there's an OB crisis," she says. "He has worked with us." But Ms. Montaldo doesn't expect good news soon. "I think it will be a matter of months, not days," before Mr. Dinallo announces new rates, she says.

Westchester Medical Space

ProMed Properties Group of North Miami Beach has purchased five medical office buildings in White Plains. It has also bought adjoining property, where it plans to put a new medical office building. The complexes are separate entities on Westchester Avenue. The company, part of Gazit-Globe Ltd. of Tel Aviv, paid \$55.3 million for the buildings, on 14.3 acres near Interstate 287. The structures have a total of 189,000 square feet, 96% of it already leased. The tenants are The Laser Center, Westchester Orthopedic, Surgical Synergies, Nyconn Orthopedics and Neurosurgeons of New York.

Stats on the Uninsured

Health Insurance Coverage in New York, 2005-06, the United Hospital Fund's annual chart book of the demographics of New York's uninsured, has been updated and expanded. Data show that the number of uninsured is growing again in the state. The report is available at http://www.uhfnyc.org/pubs-stories3220/pubs-stories_show.htm?doc_id=688069.

Brooklyn CareWorks goes under

When Brooklyn CareWorks, the former Brooklyn Psychiatric Centers, filed for Chapter 11 protection April 30, supporters hoped that the agency could get some financial breathing room. Instead, it is closing down permanently.

Brooklyn CareWorks' approximately 50 employees have been notified that they no longer have jobs, and its 2,000 patients have been assigned to other clinics. Workers say that union lawyers showed them legal documents detailing the financial woes and that the agency—which runs five clinics, as well as school-based counseling and home visit programs—owes the IRS \$2 million in payroll taxes and has \$900,000 in other debts.

Staffers blame badly run billing operations for financial problems at Brooklyn CareWorks, which had an annual budget of \$3 million, and say that its inability to collect from insurers had kept the organization in the red for years. Because the agency was several months in arrears with the union benefits fund, the workers lost their 1199 SEIU health benefits from April 23 to June 1 and were exposed to thousands of dollars in medical bills.

According to Kathleen Stack, a social worker at the Bushwick clinic, one worker owes \$40,000 for her daughter's surgery. Though workers' official termination date is July 25, their health insurance expired yesterday. Cobra coverage will cost \$777 a month for an individual and \$1,550 for a family, Ms. Stack says.

At a Glance

CLARIFICATION: SUNY-Downstate isn't gone. In the June 27 *Pulse*, the wording of an update on Berger closings caused some alarm in Brooklyn. Though some hospitals in the "downstate" region have closed, the state hospital known informally as "Downstate" has not. In fact, today the hospital opens a new ambulatory care center at the site of the former Victory Memorial Hospital in Bay Ridge.

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