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InsideHNE

A R E S O U R C E F O R D E C I S I O N M A K E R S

**Special Pull-Out Section -
Regulatory Updates**

**Peter Straley on
Health Care Reform**

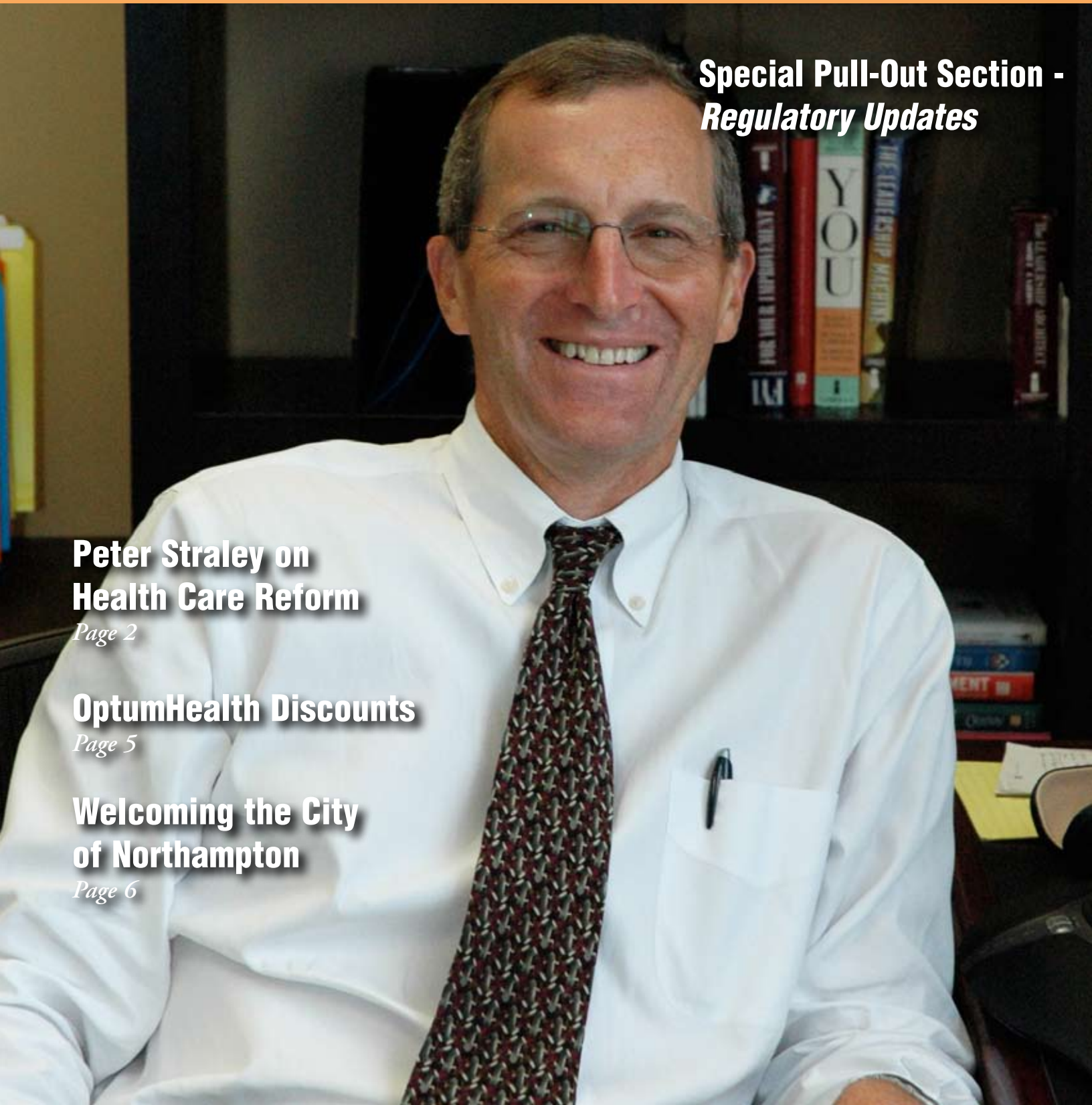
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Writer/Editor: Joe Kane

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800-842-4464.

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Introducing the Employer Advisory Board

Yet another advantage of going with the local plan – we not only listen to your feedback, we invite you in to share it with us!

That's right. We want to hear from **all** of our customers. So we invite members, providers, and **now employers** to participate on standing committees that meet regularly to discuss their experiences with HNE.

The Employer Advisory Board met for the first time in May and will continue to meet six times each year. It gives our employer groups a chance to tell us what they need and whether or not we are meeting their expectations.

For more information, call HNE Sales at 413-233-3555



Health Care Reform

By Peter Straley

The major thrust of health care reform at the national level is to achieve near-universal coverage while simultaneously ensuring that we have a more affordable health care system. HNE supports both of these goals and, since we began operating nearly 25 years ago, we've sought to expand access to coverage and affordable health care here in Western Massachusetts.







Massachusetts already has passed landmark health care reform legislation and, in conjunction with existing regulations, has already implemented many of the same "reform measures" now being discussed as part of the national policy debate. As a result, Massachusetts-based insurers, health care providers, and health care consumers have a leg-up on these requirements – after all, we've been meeting them since at least 2006.

The table (National Healthcare Reform MA Healthcare Reform: A Comparison), on the next page, briefly describes where we are ahead of the curve for national health care reform.

Each year, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts compiles statistics about the programs

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NATIONAL HEALTH CARE REFORM/MA HEALTH CARE REFORM: A COMPARISON

Proposed National Requirement	Required in MA	How it works in MA
Universal coverage for children		✓ Virtually all children are covered in MA through expansion of the Medicaid program and through the new, subsidized products offered through Commonwealth Care.
No exclusions for pre-existing conditions		✓ Massachusetts is a “guaranteed issue” state which means anyone can get coverage regardless of pre-existing conditions (this was in place prior to the 2006 law, although many residents were not aware of its existence).
Merge small group and individual markets		✓ This was accomplished in 2006, resulting in individuals being offered the same products at the same price as small businesses.
Exchange where individuals and small businesses can go to buy insurance		✓ The Commonwealth Health Connector provides for standardized plan designs offered side by side through different carriers.
Individual mandate with penalty for not having insurance		✓ Individuals must file proof of insurance coverage with their annual tax return. A penalty is assessed to those who cannot provide proof of coverage. Today, the penalty is 50% of the premium for the least costly health plan available through the Health Connector.
Employer mandate or pay or play		✓ The Massachusetts legislation imposes assessments on employers that do not offer coverage; however, employers can avoid the penalties by enrolling workers in the Connector and offering them a Section 125 plan. → Pay or play provisions at the national level may impose more strict compliance requirements on employers.

Health Care Reform (Continued from page 2)

and requirements outlined in the table.

If you would like to look at this information in detail, go to mass.gov and in the Search field type, “Health care in Massachusetts: Key Indicators.”

Okay, so far so good, because in Massachusetts, health insurance carriers already have tackled most of the issues related to near-universal coverage that national health care reform would address. The one big difference relates to the proposal to create a public, government-run health insurance plan. Proponents of this approach suggest that such a plan would introduce competition, keep the private plans honest, lower costs, and level the playing field across the country. Health insurance carriers are not the only ones who have raised concerns – employers, providers, and patients also are worried about the unintended consequences of such a plan.

These concerns are not based just on a fear of the unknown; they’re based on experience with the existing public plan – Medicare. Briefly, a government-run plan is likely to:

- Accelerate the cost-shifting from public programs to



private payers because the reimbursement rates that Medicare and Medicaid pay to hospitals and physicians do not cover the costs of delivering care – thus the cost for private insurance will rise even faster than it would otherwise

- Result in reduced choice, not increased choice since private employers ultimately will switch to the public plan because it can set provider payment rates to below market rates
- Undo the progress that private health plans have made towards quality focused initiatives like care coordination, disease management, and health promotion (none of which are offered by Medicare)
- Add additional liabilities to the federal budget.

The last bullet-point brings up another key issue – taxes. With cost estimates of more than a trillion dollars for a government-run plan, someone, at some point, will have to pay for it. So far, the only mention in Congress of a tax increase to pay for the program involves the wealthiest Americans. In our opinion, it is all but inevitable that to maintain such an expensive program, taxes would have to increase across the board. We can find evidence of this in the fact that individuals in other countries with a national plan pay higher taxes than we do.

It’s a complicated issue with a lot of moving parts and no simple solution. Unfortunately, none of the proposals or solutions put forward so far, at either the state or national level, has offered any convincing options to address the most fundamental problem in health care today – making health care affordable. As you watch the debate unfold at the national level, we suggest you pay close attention to this last point. In the end, the ultimate success of “reform” hinges on our ability to rein in the increasing costs of delivering the health care that we, as patients, all want.

Optum Discounts

Through our partnership with OptumHealth Care Solutions, HNE members get a discount on certain complementary and alternative medicine services. Members can receive discounts at participating dietitians, nutritionists, licensed acupuncturists, massage therapists, or naturopathic doctors.

While most HNE Plans do not cover Alternative Medicine Services, the services above are offered at a discount. For more information or to find a provider, members can go to hne.com/HNE_Members or contact HNE Member Services.

Note: This discount is available only for groups with the chiropractic rider.



HNE Employer Wellness Programs

We want to help you implement a great wellness program in your business. Not only will this set you apart as an employer of choice in the community, but research suggests that businesses that invest in workplace wellness, realize savings through a decrease in absenteeism and workers' compensation claims.

HNE provides a comprehensive array of wellness programs, workshops, and screenings at employer worksites. Our Health Programs staff will meet with you to design a schedule that works best for your work environment.

We look forward to working with you and your employees!

An Effective Way For Smokers To Quit

Health New England will be offering the Freedom From Smoking® program, an 8-week smoking cessation class for adults.

Freedom from Smoking® has been America's gold standard



Connie Lynch and Maria Garrity of Health Programs

smoking cessation program for over 25 years.

According to Connie Lynch, the HNE Health Programs Educator, the program is especially helpful because "it's taught by a trained facilitator who helps participants learn what triggers their smoking, when they're most likely to smoke, and the best way to approach the quitting process."

For more information about HNE Employer Wellness Programs or the Freedom From Smoking® program, please call 413-233-3034, Monday-Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Welcoming the City of Northampton

HNE would like to welcome our newest municipality, the City of Northampton, to our family of employer clients.

Through the RFP process, the City of Northampton expressed a need to reduce their escalating health care costs while continuing to provide comprehensive benefits to their active employees and retirees.

HNE met that need by providing an array of cost-effective benefit plans, including an HMO, PPO,

and Medicare Advantage HMO for retirees and Medicare eligible beneficiaries.

According to Mayor Mary Clare Higgins,
“With the \$1 million the City is saving by switching from our incumbent carrier to Health New England, we’ll be able to restore \$500,000 to the School Department budget.”

“We understand that changing carriers can be disruptive. At HNE we want to minimize that disruption by anticipating and understanding issues that may

come up and by being proactive in our approach to provide quick resolution.” says Juan Campbell, Vice President of Sales.

Through HNE’s master implementation plan, we coordinated over a dozen enrollment meetings that included pharmacy benefits, member services, health services and sales staff to assist enrolling members with their options and to help transition them to the new plan. Kudos to the Northampton Benefits team and HNE for a smooth transition and Thank you to the City for having faith in our ability and products.



Meet Patty Hobert

Patty Hobert joined HNE as Large Group Sales Executive.

Patty has more than 15 years of sales experience, most recently with Johnson & Johnson.

She grew up in Holyoke, and after graduating from Holyoke Community College continued her studies at Arizona State

University, where she earned a B.A. degree in English.

She takes great pride in being a mentor in the Springfield School System, and encourages anyone with an interest in mentoring to contact her directly at 413-233-3370.

Welcome Patty!

What are Labyrinths?

Labyrinths are tools used in many cultures and religions throughout history.

Their purpose is to help those looking to bring more spiritual, emotional, psychological, and physical well-being into their lives. A labyrinth has a single, winding, unobstructed path from the outside to the center, unlike a maze which has many dead ends and wrong choices.

Labyrinths are being created all over the world at churches, hospitals, wellness and rehab centers, hospice programs, nursing homes, schools, community centers, and in private backyards.

To learn more about the labyrinth and other health programs available from HNE, please call 413-233-3391 or send an email to: mgarrity@hne.com.



Linda Vachon, Ellen Dale and Rosemary Bennett walking the Labyrinth



BECOME AN HNE FACEBOOK FAN!

Be part of the action at HNE

- **Post Your Comments** on the latest issues of the day.
- **Share the latest** news, photos, and video with your friends.
- **Be a part** of the HNE community on Facebook - we want to hear what you think.

FAN US TODAY!



One Monarch Place, Suite 1500
Springfield, MA 01144-1500
hne.com

InsideHNE

A RESOURCE FOR DECISION MAKERS

Employees Thinking of Retirement Can Stay With HNE!

Retirement is an exciting time. Many people travel, take up a new hobby, or simply spend more time with family. You can help your employees preparing for retirement by telling them about HNE Medicare Advantage Plans.

An HNE Medicare Advantage Plan provides the same great local, personal, and accountable service HNE members expect. And, they cover all the same benefits as Medicare and more. We also pay for things that Medicare doesn't cover,

like routine exams, vision screenings, dental care, and HNE's innovative health and fitness programs.

You can provide a great service to employees approaching 65 or to older employees who are considering retirement. Tell them they may be eligible for health insurance coverage through HNE.

For more information on enrollment periods, tell your employees to call HNE at 413-787-0010, or toll free at 877-443-3314.

HNE also has retirement kits available. Ask your HNE Account Manager for a supply to hand out to retirees.

