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Kern Medical Center Partners With Local Community Clinics to Provide Health Care for Uninsured Patients through the Kern Medical Center Health Plan (KMCHP)

Bakersfield, CA – March 2, 2009 -- With unemployment rates increasing every month, more patients are becoming uninsured due to job turn over and increased layoffs. Without access to regular primary care and preventive care, uninsured patients are often left with limited options for medical care, and the emergency department (ED) often becomes the only door into the confusing and fragmented health care system. With the help of a MediCal demonstration project, Kern Medical Center (KMC) is improving access to health care for uninsured patients by coordinating their services with local community clinics.

KMC provides approximately 90% of the hospital outpatient and 83% of the inpatient services for the uninsured and underinsured patients in Kern County. Many of these patients visit the ED regularly for reasons that would not normally constitute an emergency, as they do not have regular access to a primary care physician. On average, an emergency room visit costs \$560 and an inpatient bed day costs \$1,570; whereas, an average physician office visit costs \$121. Therefore, the primary philosophy behind the "Kern Medical Center Health Plan" (KMCHP) model is that all patients need to be linked to a local, accessible "medical home," through which patients can easily access the right care when and where they need it. By providing patients with less expensive primary care, the county not only avoids costly ED and inpatient utilization, but also helps patients to remain healthy and better able to work and contribute to the local economy.

In 2007, KMC, contracting with COPE Health Solutions, a non-profit organization with expertise in developing solutions for other financially strained health care systems, was awarded this MediCal Demonstration Project. KMC and COPE created a new coverage program for the county, targeting uninsured patients ages 19 to 64 who do not qualify for public programs such as MediCal, Medicare or Healthy Families. Similar to a managed care model, KMCHP provides eligible patients with outpatient primary care, specialty care, and diagnostic services currently available to patients with MediCal, while simultaneously improving coordination of care in a way that positively impacts all patients seen at KMC and network community clinics across Kern County. COPE and KMC are working together to identify innovative opportunities for growth, efficiency, scalability, and financial sustainability for the model.

A key aspect of the KMCHP is the development of a structured information technology (IT) network between primary care clinics, specialty care clinics, and KMC to share patient information. As a part of this information sharing network, KMCHP has selected *ikaSystems*, a national, innovative and proven claims processing system that allows automation of key business processes on one integrated web-based platform. This system can serve as a vital and essential instrument to bringing support and collaboration between Kern Medical Center and community providers.

By bringing the best practices of managed care to the network, KMC hopes to redesign the way uninsured patients are cared for in Kern County.

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