

Nurses' guide to single-payer reform

Activists gather to honor champions, support change

Despite monsoon-like weather, friends and colleagues assembled in the Dante Alighieri Cultural Center in Cambridge on May 13 to honor the MNA's own Peggy O'Malley, as well as Alan Sager and Debbie Socolar of Boston University's School of Public Health. A special "champion of the year" award was presented to Katie Murphy, a Brigham and Women's nurse who is also a community leader from Framingham.

This event, the eighth annual Dr. Benjamin F. Gill Memorial Award Reception, marked a turning point in the development of a grassroots movement for fundamental health care reform in the commonwealth to supplement the eleven-year history of the MASS-CARE coalition. The Massachusetts Campaign for Single Payer Health Care and its educational/research partner, the Universal Health Care Education Fund, have long been on the cutting edge of real reform—but recent developments have highlighted the need for a grassroots movement based in every legislative district in order to create and build a just health care system in Massachusetts and across the country.

Peggy O'Malley

Peggy O'Malley is a front-line nurse who has always combined clinical practice with political advocacy on behalf of her patients. A graduate of Emmanuel College and Saint Louis University, she has served as a legislative aide to Sen. Edward Burke when he was Senate chair of the Joint Committee on Health Care, and as a bedside nurse at Brigham and Women's Hospital. She fought for quality care and health care justice across the negotiating table and on the picket line. She was one of several hundred nurses at the Brigham whose health was impacted by poor indoor air quality and she developed multiple chemical sensitivities as a result. Afterwards, O'Malley joined the fight to establish a safe work environment. She served and helped to organize the nursing community throughout years of work at the MNA, serving on the Cabinet for Labor Relations and the Board of Directors. In 1997, O'Malley was the first recipient of the Judith Shindul-Rothschild Leadership Award. She served as the MNA's first vice-president after its transition in leadership on December 1, 2000. For years, O'Malley represented the MNA on the coordinating committee of MASS-CARE, and she chaired that body for more than 36 active and energetic months. Peggy lives in Gloucester where she continues the fight to preserve vital community hospitals as leader of the advocacy group "Partners for Addison Gilbert."

Alan Sager

Alan Sager, a longtime resource for the MNA's statewide campaign for safe care and the MASS-CARE campaign for a state-based single-payer system, has been a professor at Boston University's School of Public Health for almost 26 years. His courses on health care finance and planning have won five awards, and he received the school's teaching prize in 1998. From 1975 to 1983, Sager taught at the Heller School for Advanced Studies in Social Welfare at Brandeis University. He is a fixture in the social movement for meaningful health care reform, a fountain of information and

insight for movement activists, and a tireless champion for single-payer reform.

Deborah Socolar

For 18 years, Deborah Socolar has undertaken research and educated the public on ways to achieve equitable access to health care for all while controlling costs, in Massachusetts and nationally. She helped staff a mayoral task force in Boston that fostered creation of the "free care pool," and she played an important role in winning substantial expansion of the state's prenatal care coverage. Socolar has served on the national board of the Universal Health Care Action Network since 2001. Coming from a union family and with early roots in the labor movement, she has played a vital role in supporting the single-payer movement and struggles for progressive health care reform in Massachusetts.

Sager and Socolar have forged a powerful partnership as co-directors of the Access and Affordability Monitoring Project, which was established in 1988 to analyze the causes of health care access and cost problems in Massachusetts and other states. The projects ultimate goal: to design better ways to finance and deliver health care. Sager and Socolar are currently engaged in monitoring the impact of the newly-passed Massachusetts "universal" health insurance bill. Early on, they identified its failure to link access and cost control as a fatal flaw.

Katie Murphy

A special surprise award was presented to Katie Murphy, an ICU nurse from Brigham and Women's Hospital and former chair of the Framingham Board of Selectmen, in recognition of her outstanding advocacy work in support of S.755, An Act to Establish the Massachusetts Health Care Trust. Specifically, Murphy was able to testify on behalf of the solution at the bill's all-important July 20 hearing last year, as well as at a Congressional hearing at Faneuil Hall on Sept. 1, 2005. Recognized in her community as fighting to establish a community clinic in downtown Framingham, Katie was targeted for defeat in this past spring's municipal election by those using fear of immigrants as a wedge against the health and well-being of us all. She continues to be engaged in her community and will be heard from again and again.

Health care constitutional amendment seeks final vote at July 12 ConCon

On July 12, the Legislature will reconvene in Constitutional Convention to decide whether to put the Health Care Amendment on the November ballot. This amendment would require our commonwealth to guarantee affordable comprehensive health care coverage to all Massachusetts residents—so the final push is on to win this right to health care.

Please contact your legislators, tell them you support the health care amendment and tell them to make sure that the amendment comes up for a vote on July 12. ■



Award recipients and keynote speakers. From left, Debbie Socolar, Katie Murphy, RN, Peggy O'Malley, RN, Rand Wilson, Steffi Woolhandler, MD, and Diane Dujon.



From left, Jeanine Burns, RN from Addison Gilbert Hospital in Gloucester, Kathy Evlog, RN, president of MNA Region 4, and Peggy O'Malley, RN at MASS-CARE's ceremony.

Keynote speakers at this gala event included Rand Wilson, organizing director of IUE-CWA Local 201; Diane Dujon of the College of Professional and Community Service of University of Massachusetts Boston; and Dr. Steffi Woolhandler, an internist at Cambridge Health Alliance and a founder of Physicians for a National Health Program.

The nursing community and MNA also came out in force to honor the awardees. MNA president Beth Piknick and vice president Donna Kelly-Williams were in attendance,

as well as MNA researcher Roz Feldberg; Region 4 president Cathy Evlog; Jeanine Burns from Addison Gilbert Hospital; and Cece Buckley, co-chair at Saint Elizabeth's Hospital and past president of Region 5. Ann Eldridge-Malone, director of the Alliance to Defend Health Care and former member of MNA's Congress on Health Policy and Legislation was also in attendance, as were MNAers Michael Malone, Merrie Eaton and Sandy Eaton. ■

Jobs with Justice update

The focus of the Jobs With Justice (JWJ) Health Care Action Committee over the last few months has been to get the Health Care Constitutional Amendment on the ballot in November. To that end, JWJ created a group called Massachusetts Labor For Health Care—which was responsible for producing the majority of the 16,000 postcards that were delivered to the Legislature in support of the amendment. In addition, 44 labor leaders signed a letter addressed to each senator and representative asking for a commitment to finish the job on health care by passing the constitutional amendment. On May 9, the day before the scheduled Constitutional Convention, over 150 supporters rallied in the rain in T-shirts that read, "Make Health Care Our

Right!" Sen. Steve Tolman, lead sponsor of the amendment, told supporters "not to take 'no' for an answer" and to continue their fight to make health care a right of every resident in the commonwealth.

Despite an intensive lobbying effort, the vote—which would have determined the fate of the amendment—was postponed until July 12. JWJ is continuing to move forward with the campaign in an effort to make legislators accountable to their constituents who are clearly affected by the health care crisis. Jobs With Justice is planning a legislative briefing of Massachusetts Labor For Health Care members in June to discuss the health care crisis within organized labor and how to deal with it. ■