

HAMASPIK GAZETTE

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News of Hamaspik Agencies and General Health



Hamaspik Approved to Open Special-Needs Satellite Clinic in Kiryas Joel

Decade-Plus of Effort Delivers "Article 16" to Upstate Community

Day in, day out—week after week, month after month, and year after year—for an entire decade, the community's repeated and sometimes-desperate call for a special-needs clinic was never far.

With a keen finger on its grass-roots pulse, Hamaspik—and later, its NYSHA (New York State Hamaspik Association) parent body—never let the need for an "Article 16" drift to the back burner.

Said clinics, named for the section of the New York State Public Health Law that allows for their creation, are health facilities designed specifically for individuals with special needs.

Because people with intellectual or physical disabilities are not-infrequently misunderstood by mainstream caregivers, leading to discomfort or reticence in visiting doctors, the Article 16 provision allows for the opening of clinics where caregivers are specially trained to serve them.



OUTSTANDING Individuals and staff of Hamaspik of Rockland County's Day Habilitation Program with the fruits of their yard-clearing labor

Likewise are such facilities physically designed and furnished to allow for maximum accessibility, an accommodation whose hindering absence can be found today at too many mainstream doctors' offices.

Because the number of special-needs individuals continues to grow both in the population at large and in the communities served by Hamaspik, the agency had long wanted an Article 16.

Last year, its years-long wish came true.

After clearing several final hurdles, the NYSHA Article 16 Clinic opened its doors at 293-295 Division Avenue in the heart of Brooklyn's Williamsburg neighborhood.

But no sooner had the Clinic opened and began seeing patients than Hamaspik's leadership, never one to rest on its laurels, began efforts anew to bring the clinic's services upstate.

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Massive Changes to Special Needs, Public Health Programs Rapidly Approaching

Cuomo fast-tracking "1115 Waiver" funding model as part of Albany budget

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo released the New York State Budget for Fiscal Year 2013 this past month, presenting a document filled with energetic and massive changes.

Some of the budget items slated

for the biggest changes are New York State's Medicaid program in general—and programs for special-needs individuals in particular.

The budget's proposed changes are expected to significantly impact

individuals with special needs served by human-services agencies like Hamaspik.

And the single-most fundamental change involving special-needs individuals is the dramatic revamping of the OPWDD's current funding system. The New York State Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) oversees many of the programs and services provided by Hamaspik and other human-services agencies to individuals with special needs.

OPWDD in which set rates per services rendered are phased out and replaced with a single lump sum of estimated costs per beneficiary.

This model is currently used by New York State's Medicaid and Medicare healthcare programs. It's now being applied to special-needs services.

Special-needs services providers would thus not bill the state for each billable unit of, say, the At-Home Respite Program, and then get reimbursed.

Instead, the state will be creating a number of Developmental Disabilities Individual Support and

implement a payment model for the

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HAMASPIK GAZETTE

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In with the new

New York State intends to



O P W D D

Community Habilitation

Providing: Personal worker to achieve daily living skill goals

Home Based Respite

Providing: Relief for parents of special needs individuals

After School Respite

Providing: A program for after school hours and school vacations

Supplemental Day Hab Program

Providing: an extended day program

Camp Neshomah Summer Day Program

Providing: A day program during summer and winter school breaks

Individual Residential Alternative

Providing: A supervised residence for individuals who need out-of-home placement

Individual Support Services

Providing: Apartments and support for individuals who can live independently

Family Support Services

Providing: Reimbursement for out of ordinary expenses for items or services not covered by Medicaid

Day Habilitation

Providing: a Day program for adults with special needs

Article 16 Clinic

Providing: Physical therapy · Occupational therapy · Speech therapy · Psychology · Social work · Psychiatry · Nursing · Nutrition

Environmental Modification

Providing: Home modifications for special needs individuals

Supported Employment

Providing: support and coaching for individuals with disabilities to be employed and maintain employment

Enhanced Supported Employment

Providing: Job developing and coaching for people with any type of disability

Medicaid Service Coordination

Providing: An advocate for the individual to coordinate available benefits

Home Family Care

Providing: A family to care for an individual with special needs

Intermediate Care Facility

Providing: A facility for individuals who are medically involved and developmentally delayed

IBS

Providing: Intensive Behavior Services

Plan of Care

Providing: Support for the families of individuals with special needs

D O H

Traumatic Brain Injury

Providing: Service Coordination · Independent living skills training · Day programs · Rent subsidy · Medical equipment · E-Mods · Transportation · Community transmittal services · Home community support services

Early Intervention

Providing: Multidisciplinary and supplemental Evaluations · Home and community based services · Center based services · Parent/child groups · Ongoing service coordination · Physical therapy · Occupational therapy · Speech therapy · Special education · Nutrition · Social work · Family training · Vision services · Bilingual providers · Play therapy · Family counseling

HamaspikCare

Personal Care & Support Services

Providing: Home Health Aides · Homemakers · Personal Care Aides · Housekeepers · HCSS aides

Counseling Services

Providing: Dietician/Nutrition counselors · Social Workers

Rehabilitation Services

Providing: Physical therapy · Speech therapy · Occupational therapy · individuals

PACE-CDPAP

Providing: Personal aides for people in need

Care At Home

Providing: Nursing · Personal care aide · Therapy · Respite · Medical supplies · Adaptive technology · Service coordination

Nursing Home Transition and Diversion

Providing: Service Coordination · Assistive technology · Moving assistance · Community transitional services · Home community support services · E-Mods · Independent living skills · Positive behavioral interventions · Structured day program

Child & Adult Care Food Program

Providing: Breakfast · Lunch · Supper · Snack

Social and Environmental Supports

Providing: Minor maintenance for qualified

Social Model

Providing: A social day program for senior patients

Nursing Services

Providing: Skilled observation and assessment · Care planning · paraprofessional supervision · clinical monitoring and coordination · Medication management · physician-ordered nursing intervention and skill treatments

HCR

Access To Home

Providing: Home modifications for people with physical disabilities

RESTORE

Providing: Emergency house repairs for senior citizens

HOME

Rehabilitation Program

Providing: Remodeling dilapidated homes for low income home owners

NYS ED

Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Providing: Employment planning · Job development · Job placement

Job coaching

Intensive and ongoing support for individuals with physical, mental and/or developmental disabilities to become employed and to maintain employment

NYS HA

Training

Providing: SCIP · CPR & first aid · Orientation · MSC · CORE · A-JMAP · Annual Updates · Com-Hab/Respite · Family Care training · Supportive Employment

Central Intake

Providing: The first contact for a person or family in need of Hamaspik services

Hamaspik Gazette

Providing: A bilingual monthly newspaper informing the community of available Hamaspik services

Parental Retreats

Providing: Getaways and retreats for parents of special needs individuals · Parent support groups

Docs Decry Congress' Doc Fix Delay

Congressional leaders stalled in early February on how to develop a permanent fix to the Medicare physician payment formula—finally agreeing on a temporary two-month fix that does little to solve the long-term problem.

Physician associations quickly denounced Congress for failing to find a permanent solution to Medicare's sustainable growth-rate formula after lawmakers reached a tentative agreement that would force them to revisit the issue at the end of the year.

The deal would avert a 27.4% Medicare payment cut to physicians after Feb. 29 and extend current payment rates through the end of 2012, according to a GOP aide.

"We are deeply disappointed that Congress

has missed a unique opportunity to repeal the SGR once and for all and instead has chosen political expediency over patients," Dr. Susan Turney, president and CEO of MGMA-ACMPE, formerly the Medical Group Management Association, said in a statement.

"Physician practices now face a mounting 35% payment threat from Medicare in 2013 and Congress has dug itself a \$400 billion hole," Turney's statement continued. "Group practices are telling us that this congressional decision exacerbates an already unhealthy environment that limits their ability to plan for the future and balance their practice's fiscal health with their desire to continue to serve Medicare beneficiaries."

Flu in the News

Flu season finally arrives, CDC reports

Been wondering where winter is? Apparently, the flu virus has been wondering, too—which is why the flu season may finally be picking up steam after the slowest start in nearly three decades, a new report suggests.

In mid-February, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports an uptick in the number of nationwide samples testing positive for the virus—suggesting that the flu season is just off to a late start.

Interestingly, it's only the second time in 29 years that the percentage of respiratory samples testing positive remained under ten percent through January.

Flu season generally hits as early as October and can continue as late as May.

The CDC's report comes after a mild winter—and accompanying mild flu season. "If you look at the nation as a whole, we are seeing low activity across the country," Tom Skinner, a CDC spokesman, said in January.

Just 1.4 percent of outpatient visits during the week ending Jan. 7 were for flu, according to the CDC, compared to a seasonal average (over the past three years) of 2.4 percent.

The best Jan. flu news involved children, according to the CDC, which reported that no pediatric flu fatalities during that time, compared to the four pediatric flu-linked deaths that had already been reported by Jan. 1, 2011.

However, Skinner had also said that "As we move to February, we expect that activity will increase"—as it did, though not by much.

Blame the birds

Two U.S. scientists have proposed a plausible if not interesting hypothesis on the root cause of flu pandemic: migrating birds.

The researchers posit this: Before the four last major international flu pandemics—in 1918, 1957, 1968 and 2009—the Pacific Ocean experienced La Nina conditions.

La Nina refers to a specific change in normal Pacific weather patterns—a vast phenomenon that lowers ocean surface temperatures and changes wind currents.

Perusing old records, the researchers found that normal Pacific weather patterns were consistent with La Nina in 1918, 1957, 1968 and 2009.

In turn, they posit that La Nina alters travel and nesting patterns of migratory birds—creating intermingling conditions within and between species that allow flu viruses to develop dangerous new mutations.

Old vaccines, new tricks

Scientists at the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) have now shown that past seasonal influenza vaccines, as well as an influenza vaccine from as long ago as 1976, still carry an antiviral punch potent enough to knock out the 2009 H1N1 "Swine Flu" virus.

The findings help explain how many older adults who had received the vaccine in question back in 1976 were apparently immune to the H1N1 flu virus.

Greenhouse gases or hot air? Asthma inhaler phase-out continues

Some may cry pseudoscience and arrogant environmentalist meddling, but the FDA is nearly complete in its phase-out of carbon-gas-driven asthma inhalers, replacing them with inhalers that use hydrofluoroalkane, a propellant gas said to be environmentally harmless.

The chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) that propel the epinephrine vapor medication into users' lungs are now widely believed to be harmful to the atmosphere.

As reported in the May 2010 issue of the *Gazette*, the FDA began phasing out seven popular asthma inhalers in that year, with Tilade and Alupen off shelves by June, followed by Azmacort and Intal in December, and most recently, Aerobid, which was phased out this past June.

Only Combivent and Maxair, both of which are slated for phase-out in December 2013, remain.

With their phase-out—along with the imminent permanent unavailability of the popular Primatene Mist over-the-counter asthma inhaler—asthma inhalers will only be available by prescription.

Most recently, the FDA called upon the Primatene Mist-using public to start seeking prescription replacements for their inhalers, warning that besides the phase-out, supplies of Primatene were also running low.

After 40-plus Years of Stalwart Leadership, Emotional Farewell to Jackie Spring

Colleagues, Hamaspik Hail Longtime Hudson Valley DSDO Deputy Director at Retirement Party

The crowd rose to its feet for a robust standing ovation that lasted several minutes.

It was around 7:30 p.m. on Tuesday, January 31, 2011 at the Patriot Hills Country Club in Stony Point, New York as Jacklyn "Jackie" Spring, legendary pillar of the New York State Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD), delivered the event's closing remarks, eliciting cheers that celebrated her retirement after 41 influential years with the state agency.

The OPWDD purveys a wide and multifaceted array of publicly-funded services to the state's disabled community, including many individuals served by non-profits like Hamaspik.

And paying tribute to Ms. Spring, who was instrumental in locally purveying many of said services, faces from every major Hudson Valley voluntary agency could be seen in the crowd.

Representing Hamaspik's four primary divisions were Executive Directors Meyer Wertheimer (Rockland), Joel Freund (Kings), Moses Wertheimer (Orange) and Yoel Bernath (HamaspikCare).

Rounding out Hamaspik's contingent were Special Events Coordinator Brenda Katina, Central Intake Coordinator Rochel Tress, and MSC Supervisors Nechama Nissenbaum and Perry Zelik.

But all were in attendance for

one purpose: to pay homage to the woman who had made "above and beyond the call of duty" part and parcel of her personal job requirements.

Honoring one who honored all

The party began at approximately 5:00 p.m.

Serving as emcee was Mike Kirchner, himself an agency stalwart currently serving as Director of the Developmental Disabilities Services Office (DDSO) that covers the Hudson Valley.

Before a crowd of well over 100 family members, personal friends and professional colleagues both active and retired—as well as a sizeable presence of non-profit provider contingents—speakers from across the gamut of the public and private sectors took the podium one by one to personally and publically thank Ms. Spring for her decades of difference-making service.

Also seen in the crowd were a number of elected officials.

Associate Commissioner Jill Gentile, the highest-ranking OPWDD official present, took the floor to extend heartfelt thanks and best wishes to Jackie upon her retirement—as well as to read a letter to Ms. Spring from OPWDD Commissioner Courtney Burke.

The Associate Commissioner reflectively remarked that at future



Putting it all on the table: A punctilious public servant leaves her mark

monthly meetings, OPWDD leaders will say, "What would Jackie do?"

Ms. Gentile also made a point of mentioning that this past November 19, 2011 had been formally recognized by the Rockland County Legislature as "Jackie Spring Day," in tribute to her legacy of positive contributions.

Representing an agency that benefited from Ms. Spring's intercessions for well over two decades, Hamaspik of Rockland County Executive Director Meyer Wertheimer took the floor to note how the public servant's career track, and Hamaspik's ongoing growth, followed parallel paths.

It's so much to her credit that Hamaspik is what Hamaspik is today, Wertheimer said.

In concluding his comments, Mr. Wertheimer expressed deep and genuine appreciation on behalf of the entire agency in saying that Hamaspik will forever remember Jackie Spring.

And to ensure that the retiring DDSO leader remembers Hamaspik, the Executive Director then presented a framed poem of praise surrounded by an epic collage of photographs depicting all the Hamaspik facets in which the long-time public servant had a hand.

One of those facets is the Article

16 Clinic satellite office that just opened in upstate Orange County (see cover story), Hamaspik of Kings County Executive Director Joel Freund later told the *Gazette*. The Brooklyn-based Clinic, operated by the NYSHA resource office serving Hamaspik branches, provides mental-health and therapy services exclusively to special-needs individuals.

In an effort spearheaded by Commissioner Burke to bring the Clinic's satellite branch to the cusp of Opening Day, Ms. Spring was the instrumental point woman on the ground, Freund related.

Asked for the public servant's greatest contribution to Hamaspik, he said, "Herself. Her heart."

Indeed, Ms. Spring's sensitivity to the Hudson Valley's variety of cultures and ethnicities was touched upon by several speakers.

Considering her cultural sensitivities, if attendees at OPWDD conferences were kosher-only, it would be Jackie Spring telling them where water or fruit could be found, a Hamaspik staffer later tells the *Gazette*.

Small wonder ample servings of kosher food could be found at Patriot Hills that day. What else would you expect at a retirement party for Jackie Spring? ■

New Generators Keeping Residents Safe, Warm Across Hamaspik

Backup equipment installed in aftermath of storms, evacuations

To ensure that the residents of Hamaspik's IRA group homes are literally not left in the dark, Hamaspik has installed generators in four key residences across Rockland and Orange Counties.

The agency had long wished to install the backup devices at its residences, but with Hurricane Irene and the freak October blizzard, the need became acute: Due to the blackouts caused by both those natural phenomena, residents of several Hamaspik homes upstate were forced to temporarily relocate to other facilities across the Hamaspik network.

In the storms' aftermath, however, a quartet of Hamaspik IRAs was selected to receive backup power generators—allowing them to both keep the light and heat going, and, more importantly, to serve as temporary shelters for all other Hamaspik

group homes in the area due to their strategic locations.

In Rockland County, the Concord Briderheim IRA was allotted a generator, both because of its residents' care involvement level and its central proximity to other county Briderheims.

Hamaspik of Rockland County's Fosse Shvesterheim IRA also got a generator due to its central location, as well its physical capacity for guests and residents' function level.

The third generator was installed at the Wannamaker Briderheim located in the south Monsey area, which, for whatever reason, is historically prone to blackouts in severe weather.

And finally, up north in Orange County, Hamaspik's Acres Briderheim—also due to its central location—received the fourth gener-

(Hamaspik of Orange County's Dinev Inzerheim, as Hamaspik's only Intermediate Care Facility (ICF), already has a generator to add another layer of care for its medically-involved residents.)

As of early February, a licensed electrician had visited all four homes getting the generators, Hamaspik maintenance man Zalman Stein tells the *Gazette*.

After a call for bids was put out, a contractor secured the job of delivering and installing the equipment, and, after securing no less than three required permits from various authorities, the panel-like, unobtrusive devices were affixed to the exteriors of the group homes in question.

The devices are directly connected to the residences' natural gas lines, which power them, and automatically kick in should power to

the homes be lost for 60 consecutive seconds.

They may never actually be called into service. But when it comes to caring for individuals with special needs, you can never be safe enough—at least at Hamaspik. ■

New Job Opportunities

Hamaspik's 38th St. Shvesterheim is seeking to fill Direct Support Professional positions. Various shifts are available. Please call the Manager at 917-648-6251.

At Jewish New Year for Trees, Metaphor Resounds at Hamaspik

In individuals' growth, Fifteenth of Shvat resonates across agency

The 15th day of the Jewish-calendar month of Shvat—one of the four New Years mentioned in the Mishnah, history's first Jewish-law compendium—is significant in more ways than one.

The day typically falls in mid-to late winter in most Northern Hemisphere climates, but traditionally heralds the arrival of spring's first day in Eretz Yisroel.

As a result, from Biblical times through the onset of the Jewish Diaspora 2,000 years ago to this day, Jews have marked the 15th of Shvat, mainly by hailing Eretz Yisroel's agrarian bounty.

Specifically, the sacred soil's "Seven Species"—the septet of Biblically-associated fruits of the Land's earth—are sought out for consumption on the 15th of Shvat; a special blessing is said.

These would be wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives and dates—with the latter five, topping handy edibility lists as they do, typically stocked in kosher supermarkets come the 15th.

But the 15th of Shvat—"Tu B'Shvat," as it is colloquially known—also harbors an abundance of metaphor.

With the human being as vegetable and his accomplishments fruits, the 15th of Shvat affirms not just produce but productivity—an apropos theme at an agency whose byword is growth.

Bringing Tu B'Shvat home

Fruit-dominated Tu B'Shvat parties were the order of the day across the constellation of Hamaspik Individualized Residential Alternative (IRA) group homes in three counties.

At the Forshay Briderheim IRA, "tables were set up with centerpieces of all kinds of cut-up fruits and nuts," reported Home Manager Mrs.

Sarah Fisher, complete with "beautiful colorful plates and napkins as befitting a special event."

After dinner on Tu B'Shvat eve, the residents sat down around those tables to enjoy the variety of fruits and sing songs appropriate for the occasion.

In Orange County, residents of the Dinev Inzerheim ICF—Hamaspik's only Intermediate Care Facility—went fruit shopping before the holiday's onset accompanied by their loving staff.

That fruitful outing resulted in the purchase of Biblical comestibles and a "big seudah [feast—ed.] Tuesday night," complete with lovely fruit arrangements, reported Home Manager Mrs. Etty Brach.

With quite a bit of fruit remaining the next day, staff prepared fruit salad for the residents for after-school consumption.

(While "checking in" with the *Gazette*, Mrs. Brach also mentions recent Dinev outings to a juggling show and the New York Aquarium, a royal reception for a resident's return home from a hospitalization, and the young charges' excitement at the approaching Purim holiday.)

At the Arcadian Briderheim, residents enjoyed "a huge beautiful seudah," Direct Support staffer Michael "Chuly" Gottesman told the *Gazette*. "Everyone got special desserts."

The Concord Briderheim IRA, helmed by the energetic Mrs. Shaindel Goldberger, laid down a rich tapestry of fruits across its dining room table to mark the Fifteenth of Shvat.

Likewise did the residents of Hamaspik of Orange County's Seven Springs Shvesterheim enjoy a special Tu B'Shvat evening seudah with their night staff, Manager Mrs. Miriam Heilbrun said.

And judging from the report provided by Home Manager Lipa Laufer, it seems that Hamaspik of

Orange County's Acres Briderheim spared no culinary flourish in setting a Tu B'Shvat table fit for kings.

The young adult residents of Hamaspik of Rockland County's Fosse Shvesterheim helped wash fruits and set the table for their "fruit seudah," reported Manager Mrs. Esty Landau. Led by the home's live-in couple, blessings over each fruit were recited, with the "father" of the house offering an explanatory lesson and story to convey to the residents what the holiday is.

"It was yet another beautiful family event," said Mrs. Landau.

Tu B'Shvat at Respite

The Hamaspik of Rockland County After-School Respite Program lost no time getting into the spirit of Tu B'Shvat, starting fruit-themed activities the Sunday before the holiday.

These included assembling colorful chocolate- and coconut-dipped dried-fruit kabobs, baking fruit cupcakes, and even fashioning adorable "dolls" out of raisins, dried apples and grapes.

On Wednesday, February 8, the Fifteenth of Shvat itself, the Program marked the day by making fresh fruit salad—and enough for each young individual to take some home too.

On the same day, a group of Respite boys was taken by Program Coordinator Eli Neuwirth on a fun holiday-related shopping trip to the sprawling Rockland Kosher Supermarket.

All the Tu B'Shvat activities at Respite came against the background of the facility decorated to match the month's arbor theme. The program's bulletin boards, changed regularly to reflect the program's current theme, were updated come Shvat with intricately-crafted fruit baskets.

Day Hab activities

The Hamaspik of Rockland County Day Hab Women's Division got an early start on Tu B'Shvat by marking the first of the month with a melon kebab-making activity. They also created paper "fruits" traced and decorated by hand, then mounted on a wall.

At the Hamaspik of Orange County Day Hab Women's Division, individuals prepared for the significant day by daubing picture windows with water-based murals of trees and plant life.

On the 15th of Shvat itself, the young women were joined by their counterparts from Hamaspik of Rockland County for a fruit shish kebab-making activity.

Following the fruit skewerings, the party departed for a party in the Admin/Day Hab's cavernous ballroom—a Tu B'Shvat event enhanced by pizza and the hall's new sound system.

Each table had been meticulously decorated for the occasion with intricately-crafted 15th of Shvat centerpieces. Later furthering the theme were "homemade" fruit sorbets for dessert.

The sound system came into play after the individuals finished their pies. After staff introduced the game at hand, electric music spewed from speakers as participants engaged in creative dance.

Informed by the fruit theme, the game had the young women using their bodies, and their imaginations, to dance as various produce items rightfully should, however they defined that.

Dancing apples, bananas and carrots were soon seen bouncing about the floor.

Following the individual performances, the individuals joined hands for a great circular group dance—after which participants had to talk about the fruits they had brought to life.

Next up was a fruit-reflagged version of "Pass the Salami," itself a version of the popular "Hot Potato" children's game.

"It was just nice. The girls had a good time together," said an Orange County Day Hab staffer. "It was a very fruitful day."

*

To prepare for the 15th of Shvat, the Men's Division of the Hamaspik of Kings County Day Hab crafted handmade miniature tree decorations over several days before the New Year for Trees.

And joining forces with their upstate peers for the day, the individuals traveled all the way to Kiryas Joel to take in a Tu B'Shvat party—make that a "pre-Tu B'Shvat

party"—on Tuesday, February 7 in the Admin/Day Hab building's ballroom.

The occasion was enhanced by the simultaneous birthday party for Mr. Shlomo Reisman, a much-loved longtime participant in Orange County's Day Hab program.

The Women's Division, for their part, prepared for the Fifteenth of Shvat a full week before the special day, decorating wavy-edged ceramic square plates with professional-grade presentations of fruits that would rival any top-tier restaurant dessert serving.

Divided into four sections by deftly sliced bananas perfectly curved to artfully conform to the plates' edges, the plates were filled with picture-perfect fruit arrangements.

The fruits of loving labor

At both the Men's and Women's Divisions of Hamaspik of Rockland County's Day Hab program, Tu B'Shvat took on meaning bordering on the profound this year.

For the gentlemen, the Day Hab's Fifteenth of Shvat party itself was routine enough. The individuals found themselves sitting around beautifully set tables laden with numerous fruit platters as guest speaker Rabbi M.M. Daskal, a prominent Monsey community figure, inspired his listeners with a Tu B'Shvat message. Music and singing followed.

But in his weekly report, Day Hab Manager Pinchas Knopfler pointed out that in the dictionary, the noun "fruit" can also be defined as "the result or reward of work or activity."

A related lesson was purveyed at the Women's Division, with the individuals of that program having created a giant paper tree in turn mounted on a wall.

The "branches" of the tree on that large sheet of paper, rather than outlined and then colored in, were formed by the calculated impressions left by colorful paint-dipped hands—a wordless metaphor conveying that the branches put forth by any tree are composed of hands-on work.

Continuing the thought, Knopfler first noted the Day Hab's daily operations, what with individuals being tended to in function-specific groups and individual-specific activities right down to their personal needs, capacities and wishes—fruits, if you will, nurtured to the highest possible perfection thanks to meticulous gardening.

In his weekly missive, Knopfler proceeded to pay tribute to the gardeners—and, by extension, not just those under his command but those across the entire agency.

"Without our wonderful front-line Direct Support Professional staff members, we have nothing," wrote Knopfler. "It's their work that brings to fruition these beautiful results!"

And no better time to underscore that message than at Tu B'Shvat. ■



Branches of one tree: The Rockland County Men's Day Hab on Tu B'Shvat

Regarding a Day and an Age

At Day Hab, a birthday tribute

Arcadian Briderheim IRA Manager Shlomo Lebowitz steers his staff well.

So does Pinchos Knopfler, Men's Division Manager at the HamaspiK of Rockland County Day Hab.

Leadership aside, the two men also share caring for Ezzy each day.

Ezriel "Ezzy" G. has been an Arcadian resident since mid-adolescence. Since reaching full adulthood, he's been a "Day Habber" too.

Each morning, Knopfler and crew pick up where Lebowitz and team leave off, reversing the hand-off each afternoon when Ezzy comes home.

But this day, Friday, January 6, is not an ordinary day. Coordination between Arcadian and Day Hab has come to a head and, after a week of planning, Ezzy will be celebrating his birthday.

That day

Festive. Pensive. Emotive. Birthdays run the gamut of feelings.

Sometimes dreaded, sometimes embraced, sometimes both, birthdays can salute the past, hail the future, lament opportunities lost or look forward to blue skies to come.

Sometimes, though, birthdays are not party to such sophistications, but are simply parties.

Ezzy has known for a least a week that something is brewing, says Michael "Chuli" Gottesman, his Arcadian one-on-one Direct Support Professional (DSP).

He's had a crisply pressed suit hanging in his closet the entire week, and, knowing that it was for his big day on Friday, started asking to wear it on Wednesday.

Two days later, Ezzy, King for a Day, presides over a celebration neither of glory days gone by nor of grandiose visions of days to come, but of Ezzy.

Opening statement

It's Friday, the eve of Shabbos. Though it's still morning, the Day Hab is going through its weekly routine of hosting a pre-Shabbos party of sorts, replete with customary

guest speaker.

This Friday, however, the guest of honor is neither a noted local pedagogue nor a dedicated HamaspiK staff member. It's Ezzy.

Ezzy is wheeled to the front of the room, where the space reserved for the guest of honor waits to accept... him. He settles into place, and the fact that it's his party settles on him.

The young man is then generously introduced by Samuel "Shmiel" Muller, the venerated senior Day Hab member who generally presides over every Friday Shabbos party.

Ezzy doesn't readily speak. But the glow of joy now on his face, rushing forth like a beam from a lighthouse, speaks volumes.

And the party is just getting underway.

Band of bonding

The Shabbos party usually consists of a few minutes of live music and singing, courtesy of the Day Hab's musically gifted DSPs, followed by an inspirational guest speech over lunch.

With Ezzy at the center of attention, however, once the music starts, it doesn't stop.

After Mr. Muller's effervescent introduction, DSP Mordechai Dov Neuhauser strikes up the band on the Day Hab's house keyboard, built-in drums, chords and all.

Kreisel describes a scene of channeled chaos as the excitement feeds upon itself to create an upward spiral of exhilaration. "It just built up," says he. "All the staff played instruments."

Thus the one-man band quickly becomes a two-man band as professional horn man and DSP Moshe Fried joins Neuhauser on trumpet.

A few minutes later, Yossi Dirnfield, DSP joins in on acoustic guitar. The music builds. Excitement heightens. Ezzy beams. Fellow Day Habbers clap and roar. But it only gets better.

Now a set of hand drums appear, and DSP Chesky Levy is pounding away, percussion spicing up the music as only percussion can.

Adding the next layer, DSP Shimon Kreisel gets in the act on the accordion. And all along, DSP Joel Heller lays down a rhythm track on the tambourine.

And to make it all even more fun, silly matching sunglasses magically appear on everyone's faces.

"It was very infectious, very contagious," says DSP Kreisel, who as Ezzy's assigned caregiver, has worked with the young man daily for the past two years.

For the next 45 minutes, Ezzy is in heaven.

The hour of the man

"He was very excited—over-excited," says Kreisel, describing an individual positively overwhelmed beyond words at being recognized and honored at his birthday. "He was more than happy. He was extremely happy—so excited that he couldn't say thank you properly."

As staff switch instruments mid-performance without missing a beat—Levy taking up vocals, Fried trying his hand at the drums—staff also allow Ezzy to join the band.

Kreisel brings the accordion close to allow Ezzy to peck out a few notes. Dirnfield next hands over the guitar, and Fried positions it gently under Ezzy's hands to let him strum.

Moments later, Fried even lets Ezzy take a crack at the trumpet.

With the live music playing throughout, everyone's in peak spirits. Especially Ezzy.

"His happiness produced more happiness from everyone else," notes Kreisel.

Looking sharp in his pinstriped suit and bright yellow power tie, Ezzy looks ever the man of the hour—which, at this hour, is exactly what he is.

But he's also got a smile on his face you don't see every day—or even on every birthday.

That's because this wasn't an



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ordinary birthday party, even by HamaspiK standards. It was the message, "Today, you are our guest of honor; today, you are the center of our universe."

The pictures say it all.

Saying it all

Before the party, Ezzy knew something was up, but not quite what, according to Kreisel. But with the celebration now in the recent past, if he felt he belonged, that HamaspiK is his family, he doubly feels it now.

"Everyone's his best friend," says Kreisel, asked by the *Gazette* for who at HamaspiK is Ezzy's best friend—a fact underscored by a very special party.

That's why, if he could speak as the party's guest speaker, Ezzy would say, "I'm thankful for all the help and care I've gotten," opines

Kreisel. "He was very happy and excited that people made a party for him."

This is confirmed by the one HamaspiK employee who likely knows Ezzy better than any other: Chuli Gottesman, DSP, the Arcadian staffer who's worked with Ezzy for nearly five years now.

"Seeing a whole crowd making a whole fuss over him, he would only say, 'Thank you!'" says Gottesman.

Despite his disability, Ezzy keenly understands the significance of a birthday, and that of a birthday party, Gottesman imparts. Small wonder he was overwhelmed. As Gottesman puts it, if the guest speaker could speak, he might also say, "I don't know what to say."

But most of all, Gottesman states, Ezzy would just say, "Thank you."

Happy birthday, Mr. Speaker. From all of us. ■



The face of happiness: As Shmiel Miller sings, Ezzy says it all



Why we're here: Staff surround Ezzy with sound and love

The Far-Reaching Arms of Day Habilitation

Women's Day Hab visits hospitalized peer

How far would you go for a friend?

Perhaps better phrased, "What wouldn't you do for a friend?"

It was with those sentiments in mind that a group of individuals from the HamaspiK of Orange County Day Hab Women's Division departed upstate Kiryas Joel for a morning visit to a friend.

Even if that friend, a former "Day Habber," was cooped up in Manhattan's prestigious New York Presbyterian/Columbia Medical

Center, a good hour-and-a-half drive south.

Setting out at 9:45 a.m. on the fine morning of Wednesday, February 1st, the group of visitors enjoyed a scenic drive into New York City before pulling up to Columbia Presbyterian.

Once inside the special-needs patient's room, the group of visitors spent a fun-filled, meaningful hour buoying their friend's spirits. With a little dancing, singing and even a hand drum which they had brought

for their friend to play, the room was soon filled with song and spirit.

"The hospital staff loved it," says a Day Hab employee.

On the way back, and still in high spirits, the individuals were treated to lunch at a Monsey delicatessen, after which they enjoyed picnic dessert of sorts at a local park.

"We'll be going once a week to visit her," the employee adds—perhaps even reinforcing the notion that at HamaspiK, "Day Habilitation" means more things than one. ■

Special-Needs Satellite Clinic

Continued from Page 1

With calls for help from the Orange and Rockland County special-needs communities for help ringing in its ears, NYSHA's team, led by Executive Director Joel Freund and Article 16 Director Shlomo Reichman, lost no time working on opening an Article 16 satellite branch in Kiryas Joel.

That upstate village, already home to a sizable Hamaspik presence serving a proportionately sizable special-needs community within that community, needed an Article 16's services.

Hamaspik's Article 16 clinic in Brooklyn, while a wonderful service locally, was too inaccessible travel-wise for the communities of Kiryas Joel and Monsey served by Hamaspik.

With alleviating that pressing community need in mind, NYSHA's top brass figuratively rolled up their sleeves and got to work.

Over the last several months, NYSHA progressed towards its

goal—tending to technicalities, clearing away compliance issues, setting up staffing arrangements and settling on a location.

And on Thursday, February 16, 2012, history was made again.

On that day, NYSHA's Article 16 Satellite Clinic Program received authorization to open, and on the same day, after a site inspection by the Bureau of Program Certification.

That Bureau, part of the New York State Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD), ensures that programs slated for opening are fully compliant with all pertinent laws.

The OPWDD, in turn, under whose auspices are run Article 16 clinics, oversees the delivery of publicly-funded services to special-needs individuals through voluntary agencies like Hamaspik.

Hamaspik, for its part, chose to place its Article 16 Satellite Clinic on the premises of its sprawling Admin/Day Hab building located prominently at the entrance to Kiryas Joel— further making the

building a "one-stop shopping" experience for individuals with special needs.

The Admin/Day Hab building, besides already housing Hamaspik of Orange County's full complement of Medicaid Service Coordinators (MSCs), Family Care Coordinators, Supervisors and other administrative staff, also is home to the agency's After-School Respite, Early Intervention (EI) and Day Habilitation Programs.

And now, it's officially home to the several key healthcare services provided by an Article 16 Clinic.

Said services can include a wide range of care categories. However, the new Article 16 Satellite Clinic Program, like its home base in Brooklyn, offers a narrower range of services custom-tailored by NYSHA to meet its constituents' most urgent needs. These currently are: psychology, social work, physical therapy and speech therapy.

The four services, which have been in full swing at the Article 16's Brooklyn location since its incep-



Room to grow (in): The NYSHA Clinic's current PT room

tion, will be provided at the satellite location by the same superb team as the Brooklyn site.

That team consists of Medical Director Abraham Berger, M.D., an emergency room physician at Manhattan's prestigious Beth Israel Medical Center, psychologists Alan Blau, Ph.D. and Alison Finkel, Psy.D., physical therapist Yitzchok Kolodny, and speech therapist Faigy Wieder.

Overseeing daily operations at both locations will be Clinic Director Shlomo Reichman, who was instrumental in bringing the satellite branch to Opening Day.

With the last major hurdle now

having been cleared, the Article 16 Satellite Clinic Program is slated to open in the near future. When it does, individuals with special needs throughout the region will receive the same superlative medical services as their downstate counterparts.

Considering Hamaspik's history, chances are that another communal need will spring from the Clinic—in which case the agency will merely roll up its sleeves...

The NYSHA Article 16 Satellite Clinic Program in Kiryas Joel is now fully operational and providing services. To obtain services, determine eligibility or for more information, call 718-302-3333x302. ■

High-tech patient hazards

A recent report noted the pervasive on-duty use of computers, PDAs and smartphones for personal reasons among technicians, nurses, doctors and even neurosurgeons in hospitals today, sometimes even while treating patients in the OR.

The report notes that while technology has greatly benefited medicine, primarily by helping prevent errors and giving caregivers instant access to critical patient and other medical information, it apparently is being subjected to exorbitant personal use by caregivers too, with few hospitals boasting comprehensive bans on the practice.

More doctors than ever going broke

If you've recently contemplated a medical career because of all those stereotypical rich doctors out there, think again: Doctors today are struggling to stay afloat more than ever.

A recent article highlighted a few reasons for physicians' financial struggles, particularly in keeping their private practices open:

- Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement rates getting repeatedly lowered in recent years, both for patient care and purchase of often-expensive drugs for cancer and other serious illnesses.

- Rising business expenses
- Falling reimbursement rates from private insurance companies
- Doctors' poor billing and business-management skills

Hospital-acquired infections up

The number of cases of *Clostridium difficile* infection (CDI)

Hospital Rounds

News and other hospital facts you didn't know

among hospitalized children in the U.S. more than doubled over a ten-year period, according to a new study. Researchers found that CDI in hospitalized children increased from 3,565 cases in 1997 to 7,779 cases in 2006.

In related news, a review of data on 386 infection outbreak investigations that occurred at 289 hospitals over a two-year period found that norovirus caused 18.2 percent of them, followed by staph (17.5 percent), *Acinetobacter* spp (13.7 percent) and *Clostridium difficile* (10 percent).

The rise of norovirus, a gastrointestinal bug that typically causes fever, vomiting, stomach cramps and diarrhea is significant in that many of the outbreaks originated in outpatient clinics and other non-emergency, non-acute care facilities, indicating the bug's spread.

Robots and rising health-care costs

As expensive surgical robots march into operating rooms across the nation, some doctors are getting worried that patients might not be better off with the costly machines.

In the latest study to cast doubt on the technology, researchers found similar complication rates among women treated for endometrial cancer whether or not surgeons got help from a robot.

Yet robotic surgery costs about \$1,300 more than the low-tech approach, called laparoscopy, in addition to the upfront cost of the

machine itself, which can easily be over \$1 million.

For other surgeries, robotic surgery—whose benefit over traditional surgery is often statistically insignificant—can net hospitals reimbursements three times that of traditional surgeries.

"Robotic surgery is clearly associated with higher costs, without any clear advantages," Dr. Jason Wright, a gynecologic surgeon at Columbia University in New York, told Reuters Health.

"Surgeons need to keep in mind all of the modalities that are available to them," said Wright. "The newer, more technologically advanced ones aren't always better."

The results fuel concerns that robotic surgery has been hyped unduly by manufacturers and hospitals wishing to justify purchasing the expensive machines.

Earlier this year (as reported in *Gazette* #88), a study of Wisconsin hospitals found that after their purchases of \$2 million surgical robots, the quantity of prostate surgeries performed at those hospitals doubled within three months—while the number of the same surgeries at hospitals without the robots remained the same.

The studies beg the question whether demand—patients who truly need robotic surgery—drives usage of robots, or whether purchase of robots drives more usage.

The same question, incidentally, also applies to frequently-expensive computerized tomography (CT) and magnetic-resonance imaging (MRI)

machines and other costly biomedical technology.

The high cost of operating and maintaining said devices figures prominently in the ongoing debate on lowering healthcare costs, a key social-justice goal of the Obama administration, with many experts citing them in explaining still-skyrocketing health insurance premiums.

Cameras improve hospital hand-washing

Hospital-acquired infections (HAI) have long been a thorn in the side of public health and hospital safety officers—with frequent hand-washing and surface disinfecting by hospital employees an equally known effective infection reducer.

However, studies have repeatedly shown that hand-washing and hygiene habits among doctors, nurses, caregivers and other hospital employees are far below adequate levels.

To change this, employees at a Long Island hospital installed cameras with views of every hand-washing sink and hand sanitizer in an intensive care unit. For 16 weeks, without collecting identifying personal information, they monitored workers as they entered and left patient rooms. The results were reported last month in the journal *Clinical Infectious Diseases*.

All the workers knew about the cameras, but the results were not encouraging. Just 6.5 percent of workers on average washed their

hands within 10 seconds of entering or leaving a room.

But then the researchers installed light-emitting diode boards in the hallway of the ICU announcing the compliance rates, with a little added cheerleading: "Great Shift!!" when things were going well, or "Keep It Up" when some improvement was needed.

During the 16 weeks after the installation of the signs, compliance rates jumped to 81.6 percent, and for the next 18 months the average rate was 87.9 percent.

"People's behavior does change when they're being watched," said the lead author, Dr. Bruce F. Farber, chief of infectious disease at North Shore University Hospital. "This changed the culture. It's now three years later, and people are washing their hands at dramatically higher rates."

Many ERs now charging up-front

A growing number of U.S. hospitals are implementing a pay-first policy in an effort to divert patients with routine illnesses from often-overcrowded ERs after they undergo a federally required screening.

At least half of all hospitals nationwide now charge upfront ER fees, said Rick Gundling, vice president of the Healthcare Financial Management Association, which represents health-care finance executives.

But emergency-room doctors and patient advocates blast the policy as potentially harmful to patients, and they say those with mild illnesses such as sore throats and ear infections do little to clog ERs and do not require CT scans or other pricey technologies. ■

New funding/service model

Continued from Page 1

Care Coordination Organizations (DISCOs). The state will then provide the DISCOs with fixed total sums per individual served.

In turn, the DISCOs will either provide the special-needs services themselves or contract with provider agencies.

For OPWDD beneficiaries and their families, the changes will mean four things:

- Individuals with special needs and/or their guardians will need to choose a DISCO that coordinates the same services they received until now—whether by providing those services themselves or by subcontracting those services through other providers

- All special-needs individuals, whether initially applying for services or already receiving services, will undergo a comprehensive evaluation (or reevaluation) by the OPWDD to assess their state and level of eligibility. They will then receive a rating on a new ten-point scale akin to the OPWDD's current six-point Difficulty of Care scale—based on which the state will allot a specific yearly budget to each individual to

be spent on the individual by the individual's DISCO of choice. The OPWDD evaluation will be augmented by an additional plan created by a discipline team which will determine which specific services the individual requires

- The DISCOs will become the Care Coordinators for the service(s), and the extent and source of those services, provided to special-needs individuals; coordination plans will be assembled for each individual involved by a team of professional, community advocates and other concerned parties

- Most positively, the waiting lists for various services for special-needs individuals of years past, sometimes stretching for years on end, will be significantly trimmed. Instead, individuals with special needs will be able to apply for, and meet, their needs almost immediately as said needs arise

A history of change

In switching over the OPWDD to the new payment model, New York State and the federal government, which funds much of the state's Medicaid and Medicare

expenses, are currently ironing out a number of minor disagreements.

The OPWDD is planning to kick off a DISCO pilot program on an as-of-yet unspecified date in the near future.

Changes created by the pilot program would kick in as early as spring or summer of 2012, first affecting only a limited number of agencies in limited areas—with the question not if the changes will take place, but when.

But to understand what actually will change, here's a brief history lesson first.

New York State's special-needs services delivery system, which allowed the creation of numerous voluntary agencies like Hamaspik and worthy others, goes back a few decades.

The most important turning point took place in the 1970s, when a groundbreaking news report exposed hundreds if not thousands of intellectually disabled individuals living in horrific conditions at the Willowbrook State School, a state-run institution on Staten Island.

The Willowbrook scandal burst the bubble of state-run large-capacity institutions for good, bringing in its wake the shift towards smaller and more residential housing that can be seen in today's Residential Alternative (IRA) group homes.

With the residence-oriented shift, most intellectually-disabled individuals whose care is funded by the state now reside either in IRAs run by the OPWDD itself, in group homes run by agencies like Hamaspik, or with families who take them in under the auspices of the OPWDD's successful Family Care program.

Individuals with the highest function levels and capable of living independently with minimal supervision were also given Individualized Support Services (ISS) apartments.

The above-mentioned modes of care took many years to implement, however—and their expansion went hand-in-hand with the mid-

late-1980s growth of Hamaspik, which came into being in that era to tend to the specific and growing needs of special-needs individuals within the communities that Hamaspik still serves.

And in what may be a historical precedent for the OPWDD's planned DISCO pilot program, many of Hamaspik's current flagship programs were launched in the early 1990s as Waiver programs, with most becoming official full-fledged programs by 1994. (Waiver programs, dubbed thusly for the standard qualification rules that are waived for applicants to get on them, are provided by the state's Medicaid program.)

Winds of change

New York State's drive to serve special-needs individuals humanely and make the Willowbrook era history, particularly under Gov. Mario Cuomo, helped put the Empire State at the forefront of special-needs care at national and international levels.

Beginning with New York Gov. George Pataki and President George W. Bush in the late 1990s and early 2000s, talk of belt-tightening was increasingly heard—finally taking concrete form in calls for switching Medicaid in particular, and health care in general, to a Managed Care model, though in a limited way.

With the passage of time and the growth of New York State's Medicaid budget to become the largest state Medicaid program in the U.S., Albany began making changes from the top down.

With each new administration or OPWDD Commissioner, the warning bells sounded louder and louder: Change was no longer optional.

Those calls only grew more ominous as Washington joined the chorus, pressuring Albany in recent years to streamline its disbursement of federal Medicaid special-needs funds.

Also to take into account are the winds of fiscal conservatism and budget-cutting blowing heavily across the state and country, prompting career-savvy public servants of all political persuasions and levels to at least talk a good belt-tightening game.

But calling for changing a massive services-delivery monolith involving over 100,000 special-needs individuals and their families is one thing. Delivering it overnight is quite another.

That's why Albany is now investing robustly in ushering in a new era of efficiency—simply spending dollars from Washington more wisely, allowing New York to better serve more individuals in need.

Enter the 1115 Waiver.

What change looks like

With the 1115 Waiver, also known as the People First Waiver, Albany intends to deliver special-needs services under a new model, thus delivering the spending reforms

and reductions demanded by the federal government.

As currently planned, the new services-delivery model for the OPWDD revolves around the new DISCOs.

As the OPWDD's Statewide Comprehensive Plan for 2011-2015 describes them, "These DISCOs will be the organizational foundation of our new service system"—a development that just may make the phrase "DISCO" as critical to special-needs families as "Medicaid" in the not-too-distant future.

The revamp will spread several DISCOs across the state's DDSO regions (themselves slated for consolidation and reduction in number). The DISCOs, in turn, will be directly responsible for the medical, mental-health and housing care of the individuals with special needs under their jurisdictions—and also for covering the costs thereof.

Beneficiaries will be required to select a DISCO from which to procure their benefits, similar to choosing a services provider for benefits of existing publicly-funded programs.

The arrangement is also similar to the Managed Care model currently used by for-profit healthcare providers like Fidelis to provide Medicaid benefits. The DISCOs will do for IRA group-home services, the After-School Respite Program, the Family Care Program, E-Mods, Day Habilitation and other programs what Fidelis does for health care.

And to ensure that every individual with special needs gets the minimal assistance required, the state will be imposing strict oversight on each DISCO the same as it currently does with Medicaid Managed Care providers.

Additionally, according to a number of official e-mails dispatched in recent weeks and months by OPWDD Commissioner Courtney Burke, any agency applying to become a DISCO must have industry experience—a qualification that would bar many healthcare LLCs from making the cut in the first place.

Applicants will also need to be state-registered non-profit organizations.

However, existing and active social-services agencies will be able to apply for DISCO status, enabling them to serve as benefits coordinators for all local non-profit agencies throughout their regions, in addition to any services they currently provide.

Medicaid will eventually be phased out of directly paying for services rendered to individuals with special needs, serving only as the funding source for said services to be provided by the new DISCOs.

With this model having already been implemented with Medicaid's healthcare services quite some time ago, at least in part, it's only a matter of time before Albany's Medicaid program adopts the same pay model for individuals with developmental disabilities. ■

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IN THE KNOW

All about... whooping cough

“Whooping cough? What’s that?” you may wonder.

But whooping cough, known medically as *pertussis* (purr-TUH-siss), is a serious or deadly bacterial infection that is making a comeback in several U.S. states, including New York.

A handful of pediatric cases were reported at January’s end in upstate Saratoga County.

As of January 2012, New York City reported a three-fold increase in whooping cough cases. An alert issued last month by the city’s Health Department said there were 126 reported cases between August and November, compared to 45 in the same period the previous year.

Washington State’s Snohomish County is seeing an epidemic-level spread of whooping cough, with several more cases in each of nine other areas.

And California, home to a sizable population with counter-culture, anti-establishment leanings, suffered its worst pertussis outbreak since 1947 in year 2010, with over 9,100 reported cases.

Much of that outbreak has been linked to parental refusal to vaccinate their children.

(Still, California’s current outbreak pales against the epidemic that swept England and Wales in the late 1970s and early 1980s, after pertussis vaccination coverage dropped to 30 percent in the wake of controversy over alleged vaccine reactions.)

Another heavily affected demographic, both in California and elsewhere, are infants and children in typically under-vaccinated Latino communities.

Other significant outbreaks were reported in 2010 in Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania and South Carolina.

More recently, Vermont has been reporting rising pertussis numbers.

Other factors in whooping cough’s resurgence are weakening immunity among adults in the general public decades after getting vaccinated, and even low insurance-company reimbursement rates to doctors administering the sometimes-expensive pertussis vaccines.

A growing number of regional health authorities nationwide are offering the public free pertussis vaccinations, particularly to low-income adults (especially those in close con-

tact with infants), individuals without health insurance, and young mothers.

Significantly, in January 2011, the CDC issued a new recommendation that adults over age 65 get a booster of the Tdap vaccine (see below). And the CDC and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) issued revised recommendations in late September 2011 on administering Tdap to older kids and adults.

Because the Tdap vaccine given to babies and toddlers loses much of its effectiveness after just three years, the new recommendations call for all health care workers, and adults of any ages in contact with infants, to get another single Tdap dose.

In addition, a single dose of Tdap should be given to children ages seven to ten who were under-immunized or who have an incomplete vaccination history.

Since the 1980s, the number of cases of pertussis in the U.S. has gradually increased, with 27,550 cases reported nationwide in 2010, the highest number of cases since 1959.

Pertussis infects 30 million to 50 million people a year worldwide, tragically also claiming about 300,000 lives annually, mostly children in developing countries.

While “cough” may sound harmless enough, the bacteria that cause pertussis—and its violent, painful, and prolonged coughing—are powerful enough to warrant a vaccine.

That’s why the Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis) combination vaccine is regularly given to children—and why, in the apparent absence of pediatric vaccinations, the bacteria is returning.

In the meantime, here’s everything you need to know about this bacterial infection—and about how not to get it in the first place.

Definition

Whooping cough (pertussis) is a respiratory tract bacterial infection. In advanced stages, it’s marked a severe, hacking cough followed by a high-pitched inhalation that sounds like “whoop.”

Whooping cough was a leading cause of childhood illness and fatalities in the U.S. in the first half of the 20th century. Cases reached a low in the mid-1970s thanks to ongoing vaccinations.

However, pertussis has returned in recent years, mainly among kids too young to have completed their full courses of vaccinations, and teenagers and adults whose immunity has faded.

Whooping cough is most severe in infants under one year old, especially those under six months.

Whooping cough bacteria are very contagious.

However, the infection often goes undetected in adults because its symptoms are similar to those of the common cold.

Symptoms

Whooping cough starts harmlessly enough. It takes anywhere from three to 12 days for signs and symptoms to appear—and these usually resemble those of a mild common cold:

- Runny nose
- Nasal congestion
- Sneezing
- Red, watery eyes
- A mild fever
- Dry cough

After a week or two, symptoms get worse, mainly with severe and prolonged coughing attacks. At this stage, the coughing may cause the following symptoms:

- Thick phlegm
- Vomiting
- Red or blue face
- Extreme fatigue
- A high-pitched “whoop” while inhaling

Still, many people don’t develop the characteristic whoop, particularly infants, adolescents and adults. A persistent hacking cough may be the only sign that an adolescent or adult has whooping cough.

Most people recover from whooping cough with no problems. When complications occur, they tend to be side effects of the strenuous coughing, such as:

- Bruised or cracked ribs
- Abdominal hernias
- Broken blood vessels in the skin or the whites of the eyes

In infants—especially those under six months of age—symptoms of whooping cough are more severe and may include:

- Ear infections
- Pneumonia
- Slowed or stopped breathing
- Dehydration
- Seizures
- Brain damage

Because infants and toddlers are at greatest risk of complications from whooping cough, they’re more likely to need hospital treatment. Complications can be life-threatening for infants less than six months old.

Causes

Medical

Whooping cough is caused by bacteria. Like the flu, tiny germ-laden droplets are sprayed into the air when infected people cough or sneeze, then breathed into the airways of people nearby.

Once inside the airways, the bacteria multiply and produce toxins that interfere with the respiratory tract’s ability to sweep away germs.

Thick mucus then accumulates inside the airways, causing uncontrollable coughing.

The bacteria also cause inflammation that narrows the lungs’ breathing tubes. This leaves patients gasping for air—sucking in air with a high-pitched “whoop”—after coughing fits.

Whooping cough is thought to be on the rise for two main reasons:

1. Tdap vaccines administered to children eventually wear off, leaving most teenagers and adults susceptible to infection during outbreaks—and there continue to be regular outbreaks.

2. Kids aren’t fully immune to pertussis until they’ve gotten at least three shots, leaving infants six months and younger at greatest risk of contracting the infection.

Societal

Another important factor in the resurgence of pertussis is a lingering, creeping distrust of regular childhood vaccines by over-cautious parents. (A study mentioned in *Gazette* #92 describes pediatricians’ dilemmas in encountering parents who refuse some or even all vaccines for their kids.)

For example, in California State alone, the

number of “personal belief exemptions,” or PBEs, has tripled in the past decade, allowing kids to enter school missing some or all vaccines.

Currently, California and 20 other states allow parents to skip vaccinations on personal belief bases, with some requiring a pediatrician’s signature before granting the exemption.

This, in turn, has apparently put into motion a vicious cycle of unvaccinated kids getting infected, thus helping the virus proliferate and infect even more unvaccinated kids, creating more proliferation...

Experts say that as long as 95 percent of a population is immunized, “herd immunity” keeps contagious diseases from spreading. But vaccine refusal tends to concentrate in geographical areas, creating heightened risk.

Diagnosis

If you think you or your child has whooping cough, make an appointment with your family doctor or pediatrician.

Severe symptoms may warrant a visit to an urgent care center or hospital emergency room, especially if prolonged coughing spells cause you or your child to:

- Vomit
- Turn red or blue
- Inhale with a whooping sound

As mentioned, signs and symptoms of whooping cough initially resemble those of other common respiratory illnesses, like colds, the flu or bronchitis—making initial diagnosis difficult.

Sometimes, doctors can diagnose whooping cough simply by listening to the cough and asking about symptoms. Questions doctors may ask may include:

- When did the cough start?
- Does anything trigger the cough?
- How long does a coughing spell generally last?
- Has the cough ever resulted in a red or blue face?
- Does the cough ever cause gagging or vomiting?

However, medical tests may be needed to confirm a pertussis diagnosis. Such tests may include:

- A nose or throat culture and test. Your doctor takes a nose or throat swab or suction sample. The sample is then sent to a lab and cultured or otherwise tested for whooping cough bacteria
- Blood tests. A blood sample may be drawn and sent to a lab to check for a high white blood cell count. White blood cells help the body fight infections, such as whooping cough. A high white blood cell count typically indicates the presence of infection or inflammation. This is a general test and not specific for whooping cough, however
- A chest X-ray. Your doctor may order an X-ray to check for the presence of inflammation or fluid in the lungs, which can occur when pneumonia complicates whooping cough and other respiratory infections

Treatment

Treatment depends largely on the age of the patient.

For infants, hospitalization is typically required because whooping cough is more dangerous for that age group.

If the child can’t keep down liquids or food, intravenous fluids may be necessary. In some cases, prescription sedatives will help the child rest. The child will also be isolated from others to prevent infection-spreading.

For older children and adults, treatment can usually be managed at home.

Antibiotics

Antibiotics kill the bacteria causing the whooping cough and help speed recovery. Family members may be given preventive antibiotics.

Cough relief

Not much is available to relieve the cough, unfortunately. Over-the-counter cough medicines, for instance, have little effect on whooping cough and are discouraged.

Lifestyle and home remedies

The following tips on dealing with coughing spells apply to anyone being treated for whooping cough at home:

- Get plenty of rest. A cool, quiet and dark bedroom may help you relax and rest better
- Drink plenty of fluids. Water, juice and soups are good choices. In children, especially, watch for signs of dehydration, such as dry lips, crying without tears and infrequent urination
- Eat smaller meals. To avoid vomiting after coughing, eat smaller, more-frequent meals rather than large ones
- Vaporize the room. Use a mist vaporizer to help soothe irritated lungs and to help loosen respiratory secretions. If you use a vaporizer, follow directions for keeping it clean. If you don’t have a vaporizer, a warm shower or bath also can temporarily help clear

the lungs and ease breathing

* Clean the air. Keep your home free of irritants that can trigger coughing spells, such as tobacco smoke and fumes from fireplaces

* Prevent transmission. Cover your cough and wash your hands often; if you must be around others, wear a mask

Prevention

The best way to prevent whooping cough is with the pertussis vaccine, which is usually administered via the Tdap vaccine.

Infants and toddlers

Pertussis vaccination should be started during infancy. The pertussis vaccine consists of a series of five injections, typically given to children at these ages:

- Two months
- Four months
- Six months
- 12 to 18 months
- Four to six years

Adolescents

Doctors recommend a Tdap booster shot at around age 11, because the pertussis vaccine tends to weaken by that age.

Adults

Adults should get the pertussis or Tdap vaccine every ten years, both to protect them-

selves and to protect any children around them from accidental transmission.

Vaccine side effects

Side effects of the vaccine may include fever, crankiness or soreness at the site of the injection. In rare cases, severe side effects may occur, including:

- Persistent crying, lasting more than three hours
- High fever
- Seizures, shock or coma

In related pertussis vaccine news, the FDA (as reported in Gazette #87) approved the Boostrix Tdap vaccine in July of 2011 for use in people ages 65 and older.

It must be noted that the risks of serious illness caused by not vaccinating children drastically outweigh any risks of vaccine side effects. In other words, don’t risk your child’s health because you’re afraid that vaccines are dangerous!

Bottom line? If you suspect pertussis, see a doctor, follow orders, stay home and rest.

And the best way to prevent pertussis is to make sure you and your family—and anyone who comes in contact with babies, including grandparents—are vaccinated.

Hamaspik thanks the infectious-disease researchers at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), a part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), for critically reviewing this article. ■

Alzheimer’s Research and Treatment

Front-line news and developments

Questionnaire may predict Alzheimer’s

A new 21-point “yes or no” questionnaire developed by the Banner Sun Health Research Institute may help doctors determine which patients are at higher risk for Alzheimer’s. Each question is worth a set number of points—with totals exceeding 15 predicting Alzheimer’s.

New Alzheimer’s criteria proposed, challenged

A new study shows that if new proposed criteria for the diagnosis of cognitive problems were to be applied, almost everyone currently diagnosed with a mild form of Alzheimer’s disease would be downgraded to not having the condition.

Instead, people diagnosed as having “mild” and “very mild” Alzheimer’s would be reclassified as having mild cognitive impairment (MCI), currently recognized as an intermittent stage between the normal loss of mental function that comes with age and the development of dementia.

However, some experts insist that MCI is merely Alzheimer’s in its earliest form, not a separate diagnosis, and that broadening MCI’s definition will only cause confusion.

Bad sleep linked to Alzheimer’s

Disturbed sleep is associated with pre-clinical signs of Alzheimer’s disease, researchers have found.

In a small study in cognitively normal people, frequent awakenings and a habit of lying awake were linked to higher levels of markers of the brain plaques that are a hallmark of Alzheimer’s disease.

However, researchers cautioned that it’s not clear if there’s a cause-and-effect relationship or, if there is, which way it runs. Further research is needed to determine why

this is happening and whether sleep changes may predict cognitive decline, researchers further said.

Alzheimer’s disease begins long before there are any symptoms, but signs of the beta-amyloid plaques that build up in the brains of Alzheimer’s patients can be detected in some cognitively normal people.

Previous studies have suggested that adequate sleep helps the brain flush itself clean of a daily buildup of beta amyloid, with some currently unknown process slowing that daily flush an apparent factor in the development of Alzheimer’s.

Healthy mind, healthy mind

Quick! Pop quiz! What’s one habit repeatedly associated by science with lower Alzheimer’s rates?

That’s right: regular exercise, particularly walking.

And now, a new study suggests that people who read and play cognitively stimulating games like chess throughout their lives may be lowering Alzheimer’s risk, too.

“Staying cognitively active over the lifetime may reduce the risk of Alzheimer’s by preventing the accumulation of Alzheimer’s-related pathology,” said study author Susan Landau, a research scientist at the Helen Wills Neuroscience Institute at the University of California, Berkeley.

Rising levels of a protein called beta amyloid in the brain is a hallmark of Alzheimer’s disease.

The study used positron emission tomography (PET) scans to measure beta amyloid presence in the brains of 65 healthy seniors, ten Alzheimer’s seniors and 11 healthy young adults.

The researchers found that participants who engaged in brain-stimulating activities

throughout their lives, particularly when they were young and middle-aged, had the least amount of beta amyloid—with the adults who reported the most activity having amyloid levels similar to the young adults.

More federal funding

On February 7, the Obama administration announced new efforts to fight Alzheimer’s disease, including immediately making an additional \$50 million available for cutting-edge Alzheimer’s research, including another \$26 million in caregiver support, provider education, public awareness and improvements in data infrastructure.

The administration also announced that its Fiscal Year 2013 budget will boost funding for Alzheimer’s research by \$80 million.

The announcement follows the president’s January 2011 signing of the National Alzheimer’s Project Act, which calls for an aggressive and coordinated national Alzheimer’s disease plan.

The Act also establishes an Advisory Council on Alzheimer’s Research, Care, and Services, which brings together some of the nation’s foremost experts on Alzheimer’s disease to inform the development of the national plan. The preliminary framework for the National Alzheimer’s Disease Plan identifies key goals including preventing and treating Alzheimer’s disease by 2025. As work on the plan continues, the Obama Administration is taking action.

As many as 5.1 million Americans currently suffer from Alzheimer’s disease. With the aging of the U.S. population, the number of people with Alzheimer’s disease could more than double by 2050. ■



Public Health and Policy News

Nuke plants not risky: NRC

In early February, a study released by the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) said that the risk to public health from a severe U.S. nuclear power plant accident is “very small” because operators should have time to prevent core damage and reduce any radioactive-material release.

The U.S. operates 104 nuclear power units nationwide to provide about 20 percent of the nation’s electricity.

In related news, Wolfgang Weiss, the Chairman of the U.N. Scientific Committee on the effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR), said in late January that the health impact of last year’s Fukushima disaster in Japan appears relatively small thanks partly to prompt evacuations.

Rockland Count DOH Health PSAs

The Rockland County Department of Health (DOH) issued several health-related public service announcements (PSAs) this February, including:

- Notice of its Sleep Awareness Week, to be held March 5th-11th, which exhorts adults to get seven to nine hours of nightly sleep
- A warning against ticks as the weather slowly begins turning warmer, including checking one’s self for the tiny bugs upon reentering homes from the outdoors and wearing protective clothing
- Notice of National Poison Prevention Week, which runs March 18th through the 24th and which reminds the public to safely store harmless items out of children’s reach—as well as the national poison control center number: 1-800-222-1222

In related news, a detailed map three years in the making was released by Yale University in early February, showing which areas of the Northeast are most Lyme disease-prone. Lyme disease, actually named after a small Connecticut town, is prevalent in the Northeast; it is transmitted by the bite of tiny deer ticks and is mostly cured by antibiotics.

Oh, no—not another J&J recall...

Johnson & Johnson consumer subsidiary McNeil Consumer Healthcare says it is recalling about 574,000 bottles of a grape-flavored version of its liquid Infant Tylenol distributed

nationally. McNeil has been wracked by about two dozen recalls in more than two years.

Counterfeit Avastin in circulation

In mid-February, the FDA warned the public about counterfeit Avastin now circulating across the U.S. The counterfeit Avastin, an injected drug that treats certain cancers, does not contain bevacizumab, the drug’s primary active ingredient, possibly resulting in some patients not receiving needed therapy.

First Lady rolls out healthier military menu

First lady Michelle Obama and Pentagon officials visited Little Rock Air Force Base in Arkansas on Feb. 9 to announce the U.S. military’s new and healthier nutrition standards. The new rules will see more fruits, vegetables and low-fat dishes introduced at the military’s 1,100-plus mess halls in coming months. Healthier choices will also be turning up in base schools, vending machines and snack bars, too.

The change evokes the U.S. Army’s little-publicized (but reported in *Gazette* #80) “soldier athlete” initiative that makes healthy eating part of recruits’ basic training—with, as the *Gazette* reported at the time, “drill sergeants to yell at recruits for poor protein intake as much as for poor push-up performance.”

Gazette #80 also reported: “Interestingly, it’s not the military’s first food-based foray into the civilian population’s eating habits. In 1946, military leaders’ Congressional testimony on frequently gaunt, malnourished WWII recruits spurred the Dept. of Agriculture to create the National School Lunch Program.”

More fruits, veggies in U.S. school lunches

New USDA school lunch rules announced Jan. 25 will put more fruits, vegetables and whole grains in public school cafeterias nationwide. The new rules aim to boost the nutritional quality of the federally subsidized meals eaten by about 32 million U.S. schoolchildren daily. The rules are the first major revision of school meal standards in over 15 years, and will be phased in during the 2012-13 school year.

March 21, 2012: First-ever World Down Syndrome Day

March 21, 2012 will mark the world’s first-ever World Down Syndrome Day—the result of a U.N. resolution passed last year that will require every member nation to hold an awareness day on the genetic condition.

Inclusion to rise at top NYC schools

At January’s end, New York City Schools Chancellor Dennis Walcott ordered eleven elite public high schools to boost their disabled-student enrollment numbers to reflect higher local levels.

Hard-boiled egg recall hits 34 states

A listeria contamination of hard-cooked eggs in a number of products from Minnesota-based Michael Foods has led to recalls of prepared salads, sandwiches, and other products in 34 states. So far, no illnesses have been reported.

Federal fraud busts nets \$4.1 billion

The federal government’s health care fraud prevention and enforcement efforts recovered nearly \$4.1 billion in taxpayer dollars in fiscal year 2011, according to a mid-February report—the largest sum ever recovered in a single year.

In related news, Baton Rouge-based criminal Chikenna D. Jones, 36, pleaded guilty on Feb. 3 for a 2004-2009 scheme that robbed Medicare of \$21 million in durable medical equipment (DME) claims. Nine other defendants in the case also pleaded guilty for serving as patient recruiters.

Virginia to close most institutions

At January’s end, the state of Virginia and the U.S. Dept. of Justice (DOJ) agreed that Virginia will shutter four of its five institutions for people with developmental disabilities and greatly expand community living options for those currently living in state facilities. Virginia will also be providing nearly 4,200 Medicaid home and community-based (HCBS)

waivers.

In related news, Alabama announced mid-February that most of its mental health hospitals will be shut down by May of 2013, largely as part of a major cost-cutting plan. All but two facilities will be closed, with most patients to be moved to group homes and community centers.

AAP urges family-centered hospital care

A new policy statement from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) encourages parents to stay with children and actively work with doctors during hospital stays, and doctors to offer parents proactive and positive support based on each family’s values, preferences and input.

In other pediatrics news, the *Wall Street Journal* reported mid-February that “patient firings” of parents who refuse vaccinations for their kids for fear of autism or other reasons is on the rise at pediatricians’ offices nationwide.

White House plans national disability talks

Columbus, Austin, Los Angeles, Denver, Atlanta, Boston, Minneapolis, Orlando and Kansas City (Missouri) will be hosting disability-issues conferences led by Obama administration officials from mid-March through early summer, the White House announced in February. Participating officials and agenda have not yet been announced.

Dialysis center violates ADA, to provide signers

After the sister of a deaf patient complained to the HHS’ Office of the Inspector General (OIG), Advanced Dialysis Centers of Randallstown, Maryland agreed to provide sign-language interpreters after being found to be in violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

In related news, Spirit Airlines is being fined \$100,000 by the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) for failure to adequately respond to a number of complaints by disabled passengers.

Government healthcare to reach \$1.8 trillion

Medicare, Medicaid and other healthcare-program spending will rise over the next decade to \$1.8 trillion a year, the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO) said on Feb. 7.

New York MLTCs=high customer satisfaction

A New York State Department of Health (DOH) customer satisfaction survey released Feb. 2 showed that 85 percent of enrollees in the state’s Medicaid managed long-term care plans (MLTCs) give their plans “good” or “excellent” grades.

Required flu shot for medical workers debated

A debate is underway on national mandatory flu shots for all doctors, nurses and other front-line caregivers. With the government wanting 90 percent of U.S. caregivers immunized annually against the flu by 2020, several leading medical-industry associations and non-profits—and state governments like Colorado—are for the proposed requirement, with others against. ■



Mind-reading computers

A computer that can read your mind? How's that for futuristic? But UC Berkeley researchers may be on to something really big.

The human brain creates electrical activity when a person hears or thinks words—and the researchers are hoping that by picking up the precise electrical patterns created when paralyzed patients hear specific words via their ears, or think those specific words in their minds, they'll be able to possibly match precise electrical patterns to specific words, effectively allowing them to know what words are being thought by people with Lou Gehrig's disease or stroke who cannot speak. Research is preliminary, however.

"An app for... what? Can't hear you!"

A 2008-2009 survey of over 4,500 Big Apple denizens has now found that 90 percent of New York City commuters are at risk of ear damage, primarily due to MP3 player usage.

In related news, being a young, earbud-sporting urban male may be life-threatening. A study found that fatal or injurious accidents involving headphone-wearing oblivious pedestrians almost tripled from 16 in 2004/2005 to 47 in 2010-2011. According to the study, 68 percent of the pedestrians involved were males, 67 percent of them were under the age of 30, and 89 percent of the accidents were in urban counties.

Viral/genetic disease update

NIH researchers have found the genetic mutation that causes PLAID, or *PLCG2-associated antibody deficiency and immune dysregulation*, a rare immune disorder that causes, among other symptoms, allergic hives in response to cold temperatures.

At the same time, an Oxford University trial of a new hepatitis C vaccine is showing "promising" results. No vaccine currently exists for the liver-damaging virus.

Monkeys vaccinated with a new vaccine against anthrax capsules, one of anthrax's three lethal components, were protected against lethal anthrax infection, a new U.S. Army study has found. A Stanford University study has also found that some immune cells in some people are virtually impregnable to anthrax-virus attack, opening possible paths to new treatments.

Some 45,000 Americans die each year from diseases that could have been prevented by vaccines, CDC officials said on February 2, with too few American getting needed vaccinations.

Finally, Chilean researchers are developing a new vaccine against

meningococcus B, a common cause of bacterial meningitis.

"Safe" playgrounds= bored kids

A study of 49 local daycare providers by the Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center found that modern "safety-first" playground equipment inhibits children's vigorous exercise.

At the same time, a Dutch review of prior studies linked increased physical activity with improved grades for grade-schoolers.

However, nearly 220,000 kids aged 14 and under went to the ER for playground-equipment injuries in 2009, according to advocacy group Safe Kids International—which also notes that most traumatic brain injuries in kids age 4 and down happen on playgrounds.

One solution agreed upon by experts both for and against playground equipment is non-equipment-related vigorous exercise like jumping jacks or simple ball play-usage.

U.S. cancer rates drop

The American Cancer Society reports that U.S. cancer death rates respectively fell 1.8 percent and 1.6 percent for men and women each year from 2004 to 2008—and 23 percent for men and 15 percent for women since 1990.

Pica skyrockets

Hospitalizations for pica, a mental-health disorder in which patients eat inedible items, skyrocketed 93 percent from 1999 to 2009, according to the AHRQ.

At the same time, an internal OPWDD health and safety alert called for all caregivers to develop and maintain clinical, environmental monitoring and immediate response strategies for pica.

Recycled paper towels bacteria-laden: study

Canadian researchers tested six brands of commercial paper towels typically stocked in public facilities, finding bacteria in all of them—with towels made of recycled material most heavily contaminated.

According to the researchers, the concentration of bacteria in the recycled paper was between 100- to 1,000-fold higher than the virgin wood pulp brand.

Researchers say the new paper towel finding fits with other studies that have noted high bacterial counts in other kinds of recycled paper products. Most of the bacteria found in the paper towels studied were *Bacillus* bacteria, many strains of which can produce toxins that cause food poisoning.

Experts say the findings are probably most important for people in hospital isolation units and those with weakened immune function, like babies, the elderly, and people on immunosuppressant drugs, who need to be extra cautious about contact with germs.

However, experts also caution against "going cold turkey" with paper-towel usage, noting that cases of directly-linked infection are extremely rare. For those unconvinced, they suggest washing hands with soap and hot water for 20 seconds and using air dryers to dry hands instead.

Can scented products make you sick?

A study of 25 popular scented household products—air fresheners, personal care and laundry products, and cleaning supplies—found that all emitted chemicals classified as toxic or hazardous under federal laws, including ones that can damage the brain, lungs and the central nervous system, and cause cancer.

The study was inspired by hundreds of unconfirmed cases of illness brought on by usage of said products—supposedly the cause of complaints ranging from headaches, breathing difficulties and even loss of consciousness.

The study also found that so-called "green," "organic," or "natural" items contain these chemicals too.

Most contact lenses not properly worn, cleaned

A recent survey of over 400 contact lens wearers found that just two percent follow rules for safe contact lens use. Common forms of lens misuse found by the study were: showering, swimming or sleeping while wearing contacts; using them longer than recommended before disposing of them; and merely adding to disinfectant solution in lens cases rather than dumping it out and starting afresh as required.

In a related August 2011 study by lens solution maker Bausch + Lomb, wearers were found to be using such bizarre alternatives to contact lens solution as beer, baby oil, Coke, petroleum jelly, lemonade, fruit juice and even butter.

Eye infections caused by contact lenses are relatively rare; the risk ranges from one in 7,500 for hard-lens wearers to one in 500 for people who sleep in daily wear lenses.

Face transplants forging ahead

A recent article documents 2011's three full face transplants conducted at Boston's Brigham and Women's Hospital, the first of their kind ever conducted.

The transplants, which involved

months of planning and preparation, involve not just finding suitable donors and recipients but also extensively studying and modeling their individual facial blood vessels, tissues and muscles so as to fit donor tissue to recipients.

In related news, University of Pittsburgh Medical Center surgeons presented a study on the high technology behind successful face transplants at the most recent annual meeting of the Radiological Society of North America (RSNA) in Chicago.

The presentation laid out the cutting-edge techniques used in the surgeries—combining conventional CT, MRI and even PET scans to create 3D images of patients' pre-surgery faces, including injuries (which are typically very extensive), then using modern 3D computer animation technology to construct patient facial images both before and after surgery, and then using various combinations thereof to intricately plan and execute the transplant surgeries.

Laughter good for kids' brains

Making your kids laugh is much more than just good clean family fun, it turns out. In a first-of-a-kind study, Stanford researchers determined that humor activates the parts of children's brains linked to resilience and well-being.

In related news, Concordia University (Montreal) researchers found that children's stress hormones rise and self-worth drop when friends are not present during negative experiences. "Having a best friend present during an unpleasant event has an immediate impact on a child's body and mind," said researcher William Bukowski.

Hyperbaric therapy pioneer dies

Father of hyperbaric oxygen therapy Eric P. Kindwall died on January 26 at age 78. Kindwall was the author the first textbook on hyperbaric medicine, the use of pressurized oxygen to treat carbon monoxide poisoning, decompression sickness and wounds.

Got an itch? Study it

Studies like this make you wonder what scientists do all day—but a new study has now found that itches are most itchy on the ankles and the back, and also the most pleasurable to scratch.

Injection pens can stop long seizures: NIH

A study by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) has found that using pen-like autoinjectors similar to the EpiPen device commonly used to treat severe allergic

reactions are an effective and safe method for use by paramedics to stop prolonged and deadly *status epilepticus* seizures. Status epilepticus causes 55,000 annual fatalities; the devices would allow paramedics to more quickly and safely administer anticonvulsant drugs to convulsing patients instead of using hard-to-administer IV lines.

In related news, a 26-year tracking study of epilepsy surgery patients found that surgery can significantly improve seizure control and quality of life among people with otherwise serious and hard-to-treat epilepsy.

When music is really bad for you

We've all heard of bad lyrics, bad music, or loud music being bad for you—but for too many unfortunate musicians, making music is literally bad for their health.

Musician's dystonia, a rare type of the more common neurological disorder *dystonia*, is characterized by involuntary, controllable muscle spasms triggered by playing an instrument. The muscles spasms are present only when playing the instrument and disappear at rest.

For string and piano players, symptoms strike the fingers and hands. Brass and woodwind musicians develop symptoms in the hands or face and lip muscles. Musicians may perceive the early symptoms of dystonia as the result of faulty technique or lack of sufficient preparation.

The Dystonia Medical Research Foundation (DMRF) will be holding the first-ever Musician's Dystonia Summit on March 9-10, 2012 in New York City. Leading medical experts and musicians will convene to review the latest research, support affected musicians, and chart new directions toward better treatments.

Treatment of musician's dystonia is limited, and few musicians are able to regain the technical proficiency achieved prior to the onset of symptoms. However, several musicians have succeeded in reviving their careers by dramatically altering performance techniques over a long period of time.

Recent data estimated that 1-2 percent of professional musicians are affected by dystonia, but there are likely large numbers of musicians living with symptoms who remain unidentified.

More mothering, more brain development

A new study finds that upon reaching school age, preschoolers with more loving mothers have larger hippocampi, the brain areas involved in learning, memory and stress response. ■

Hamasplik of Rockland County IRA Nurse Evie Steinhart, RN, led a required annual training session for Family Care and Respite Program providers this past Wednesday, January 25.

The two-hour session outlined all the basic and intermediate components of caring for special-needs individuals within the OPWDD-affiliated program.

The training included a review of Hamasplik's code of employee ethics, corporate compliance policies and procedures, and proper prevention and counteraction of colds and allergies.

Other serious health issues reviewed included preventing tuberculosis and sinusitis.

All OPWDD abuse, neglect and individual safety issues were thoroughly discussed, including identifying and reporting incidents and keeping a handy list of emergency phone numbers.

Mrs. Steinhart's presentation ended with participants taking an important two-page test on positive relationships with, and safe environments for, people with developmental disabilities.

A brunch was provided by Hamasplik, and the training session concluded with a few words of inspiration delivered by Hamasplik of Rockland County HR Director Mrs. Kaily Mendlowitz.

The Concord Briderheim IRA

Happenings around Hamasplik

Disability Profile (DDP-2) form, a document central to individuals' procurement of services.

Other documents commonly used by the OPWDD's Developmental Disabilities Services Offices (DDSOs), or regional centers, are the DDP-1 and DDP-4 forms, as well as Individual Service Plans (ISPs), Monthly Notes and Levels of Care (LOCs).

Said documents will be progressively integrated into the new electronic system.

Because ISPs must be shared upon request with parents of individuals receiving services, the new system will eventually grant parents electronic access to their children's ISP documents—as well as to multiple agencies delivering the various services components called for in the ISP.

"We're going basically paperless," says Sabel.

And in today's cost-cutting, environmentally-conscious milieu, not a moment too soon.

With a spate of great weather breaking out across greater New York in early February, the Hamasplik of Rockland County Men's Day Hab program took advantage of the pleasant outdoors.

"We all ran according to our

tiful outdoors afternoon," the Manager concluded.

In like manner did the Women's Division of the Hamasplik of Orange County Day Hab maximize the lovely weather to hold an impromptu lunch picnic after a morning outing.

That picnic, held at a Monsey park, came in the immediate aftermath of the young women's visit to a friend at a Manhattan hospital (see "The Far-Reaching Arms of Day Habilitation," Pg. E5).

Hamasplik staff in all three counties held the agency's first live tri-agency conference.

Over the first week of February, while out and about after hours in the community, your *Gazette's* editor bumped into Hamasplik of Rockland County IRA residents out and about in the community. A Feb. 8 visit to an orthotics office, and a supermarket run the following evening, had this editor and Hamasplik DSPs and individuals exchanging hellos—highlighting how, at Hamasplik, individuals are out and about in the community, the way they're supposed to

How Dangerous is the Bird Flu Virus?

The news and science behind the hype

More than a few bird-flu-related reports, mostly sensationalized in typical media fashion, have captured headlines in recent weeks. Here are the facts behind the fear.

Bad news for the birds

Over 19,000 chickens were slaughtered in Hong Kong this past December after two carcasses infected with highly contagious strains of H5N1 bird flu were found at a poultry market.

Other precautionary moves included temporarily closing the poultry market, raising Hong Kong's bird flu alert to "serious," and suspending the sale and import of live poultry.

The world's first major outbreak of avian flu among humans hit Hong Kong in 1997, to which the government responded by slaughtering a total of 1.4 million chickens, ducks and geese.

Bioterror concerns

As reported in *Gazette* #93, Dutch and American work on an H5N1 strain that would be highly contagious to humans has triggered calls for the work to not be published if not halted altogether.

In December, the U.S. National Science Advisory Board for Biosecurity (NSABB) asked two

leading journals to withhold details for fear they could be used by bioterrorists.

The journals have not yet said if they will publish them in full.

The World Health Organization joined the chorus of concern on December 30, calling for the research to be tightly controlled due to perceived risk of the work falling into the wrong hands.

While H5N1 has not yet naturally mutated into a form that can pass easily from person to person, many scientists fear that this likely to happen at some point and become a major health crisis.

Why bird flu isn't (yet) contagious to humans

The H5N1 bird flu virus infects birds by settling in their guts. Human flu viruses infect humans by settling in their noses, throats and upper lungs.

Because the H5N1 virus is not physically structured to attach itself to receptors in human noses, throats and upper lungs as standard flu viruses do, it generally does not pass from bird to human.

For the same reason, it passes even less easily from human to human.

The significance—and, possibly, clear and present danger—of the lab-created contagious H5N1 virus

is the fact that it's been genetically modified to allow easy receptor attachment.

The labs used infected live ferrets—whose systems most closely mimic the human response to flu—to find that the modified virus easily wafted to adjacent cages to infect non-infected ferrets.

Scientists halt research

On Friday, January 20, in apparent response to mounting international pressure, the contagious H5N1 virus research project was halted for 60 days.

In a letter to the international science community signed by 39 scientists, including the project's lead researchers, an international forum to discuss the project's pros and cons was proposed.

But on January 25, a scientist researching the modified H5N1 virus said he must be allowed to pursue his studies if deadly pandemics are to be prevented.

Despite being party to the 60-day moratorium, Yoshihiro Kawaoka of the University of Wisconsin-Madison argued in a commentary that it was urgent and vital that his work continue.

Kawaoka wrote that it would be "irresponsible" to stop the research—adding that some elements of worrying mutations he had predicted had possibly already been detected in H5N1 viruses circulating naturally in certain countries.

Kawaoka also argued that the NSABB's request for censored publication of the studies would not eliminate the possibility of experiments being replicated by people bent on doing harm.

In reality, he said, there is already enough information out there to allow someone to make a transmissible virus.

Kawaoka's findings, as mentioned, show that the modified H5N1 can be transmitted through airborne droplets.

The World Health Organization says 582 people have been infected worldwide with H5N1 since 2003, resulting in 343 deaths, most in China and Southeast Asia.



Virtually in three places at once: New technology in action

officially welcomed its newest staff members this past Monday, January 30: overnight DSPs Mr. and Mrs. Moshe Einhorn. Being fairly young and without lengthy resumes, the Einhorns' primary selling point is their collectively kind personality—which, Home Manager Mrs. Shandel Goldberger explains, is all the "experience" you really need to work at Concord.

Welcome! And best of luck.

Adoption of the OPWDD's efficient new CHOICES electronic documentation system is underway at Hamasplik of Rockland County, MSC Supervisor Arthur Sabel tells the *Gazette*.

Replacing the oft-times tedious paperwork required in servicing individuals with special needs, the streamlined new system is intended to eventually cut processing times, increase productivity and improve response times.

The system is currently handling the electronic transfer of the commonly-used Developmental

usual training," wrote Day Hab Manager Pinchas Knopfler, reporting on the Day Hab's monthly fire drill. But instead of going back in after the exercise, staff kept individuals busy with "an array of exciting outdoor activities" to "enjoy a beau-



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