



RETIRED PUBLIC EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION Chico Chapter 077

MAY 2019 NEWSLETTER

Mission Statement:

*We are active and retired California public employees working together to maintain and improve the quality of the lives of our members by protecting and improving our earned retirement, medical, and other benefits.
RPEA represents the rank and file retired public employees.*

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MEETING ANNOUNCEMENT

THURSDAY, MAY 2, 2019 - 11:15 A. M.

Manzanita Place (Chico Elks Lodge)

1705 Manzanita Avenue, Chico - (Lunch cost: \$16)

MENU

Salad Bar, Fennel Roasted Pork, Scalloped Potatoes, Fresh Vegetable Medley, Fresh Rolls

SPEAKER: JOAN PALMER

Chapter 077 Member and Treasurer



TOPIC: “Armchair Travels to Antarctica with Joan”

Joan went with Lindblad National Geographic on the Orion last Christmas Day and spent New Year’s in Antarctica. She was on the ship for 10 days and saw 9 mammals and 25 birds. “It was the best trip I have ever taken, and I have now covered all the continents!” Don’t miss hearing Joan’s interesting stories of her travels.

LEGISLATIVE REPORT – By Mary Kowta

The news from Sacramento is that many bills that may affect Northern California are in the works. The recent wildfires have left a huge impact on Butte County, but especially on our neighbors, friends, and relatives, residing in Paradise, Concow, and adjacent areas. For that reason, I will list a few bills that address wildfire prevention. These Senate bills were submitted by Senator Dodd of Napa.

SB 190 - Development of defensible space around dwellings ordinance for local governments

SB 209 - Establish Wildfire Warning Center; require utilities to install weather monitoring in high threat areas

SB 290 - Authorize the State to explore acquisition of disaster insurance

Two Assembly bills are also significant. AB 235 creates a wildfire fund for utility liability exceeding insured losses, and AB 281 which promotes underground utilities and other safety measures. Just recently, Governor Newsom received the report of the strike force he appointed in January, “Wildfires and Climate Change: California’s Energy Future.” This report can be read online by going to the Governor’s press releases.

The *Sacramento Bee* (4/10/19) reports that 22 bills concerning the cost of health insurance are under study. While these bills may not affect RPEA members, we all know family and friends who find those costs burdensome.

The RPEA Newsletter provides a review of bills currently followed by lobbyists, Read and Moran, including the bill to establish a commission on aging and an aging czar.

HEALTH BENEFITS REPORT – By Al Raitt

During the April 11, 2019, Stakeholders meeting held at CalPERS Headquarters in Sacramento, staff reviewed 3 areas of interest regarding health benefits: (1) Health insurance program appeals process; (2) Opioid management; and (3) Long-term care. Staff will be recommending to the full Board that the appeals process be extended from 30 days to 60 days so that CalPERS can consider those cases with “extenuating circumstances.” These are cases which are unusually complex or which, in the opinion of the policy holder and/or the medical service provider, require a specific procedure or medication to fully address a particular condition. Policy holders currently have 30 days from the date of initial insurance company denial, defined as the date the insurance company issued its denial notice. Although less than 5 percent of all denials need more than 30 days to be properly resolved, CalPERS staff thought that the additional 30 days would be important to request for those relatively few folks whose requests are initially denied.

Addressing the opioid crisis has included: (1) strategy; (2) safety; and (3) long-term pain. Overall, OptumRx has seen a decrease in opioid use since this approach was implemented approximately 18 months ago. It is now clear that addiction often begins after the third day of use, so it has become important early on to begin introducing the concept of decreasing the dose after the third day.

The strategy has been to encourage use of the Center of Disease Control (CDC) practice guidelines by both patients and practitioners. 96% of opioid prescriptions filled by OptumRx are in accordance with CDC guidelines. This compares with a 55% rate nation-wide. In addition to early dose weaning, high risk patients are provided with educational materials emphasizing relapse prevention including information about the opioids

themselves as well as the type of behaviors which will support the relapse prevention effort. Implementing the CDC guidelines has involved CalPERS staff working with the California Department of Health Care Services, Covered California, and OptumRx, as well as Kaiser and Blue Shield both of which manage their own pharmacy benefits. Safety measures include warning labels on the prescription containers and disposal kits which aid in the disposal of unused medication. The kit is an environmentally friendly bag into which the unused medication and water are added. The bag is then closed and disposed of in the same manner as ordinary household refuse.

For people with chronic pain experiences OptumRx has been working with various service providers about when to refer to pain specialists for both the traditional and alternative therapies. Also helpful has been the introduction of prescription pads using printing tools to make the prescription instructions clear and legible.

The “Long Term Care” program (not to be confused with the Long Term Care Insurance Program) will be presented to the full Board as a result of the Federal Chronic Care Act which became law as of Feb 9 of this year as part of the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 and allows Medicare Advantage Plans more flexibility in offering such “non-medical” benefits as bathroom grab bars and wheelchair ramps for those with chronic illnesses, increased telehealth services, and in-home dialysis for those with chronic kidney disease. In California, the Medicare Advantage plans operated by Kaiser and United Health Care will begin offering these services as early as this year if approved by the full Board. So, if you or someone you know is dealing with the issues of health insurance company appeal denials, the opioid crisis, or the long-term care programs being implemented by a Medicare Advantage program listed above, monitor the information that will be provided by CalPERS for these programs to stay abreast of the latest developments.