

Catholic HMO to set up shop in five counties

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

GATES — Before year's end, Medicaid patients in five diocesan counties — Monroe, Wayne, Yates, Seneca and Ontario — will be able to enroll in a managed care plan established by the state's bishops, according to Jack Balinsky, diocesan director of Catholic Charities.

Called Fidelis Care New York, it is reportedly the only health maintenance organization in the state that is directly affiliated with the Catholic Church.

Under a state plan, Medicaid recipients are being phased county by county into mandatory managed care. The process is to be completed by December in the year 2000. This year, the five diocesan counties targeted by Fidelis are being phased in.

Fidelis operates in 24 New York counties outside the Diocese of Rochester, according to Mark L. Lane, president and chief executive officer of Fidelis. The HMO is based in New York City, with offices in Amherst, Albany and Syracuse.

Balinsky, Lane and Michael Wagner, chief medical officer for Fidelis, recently took part in a joint interview with the *Catholic Courier*.

Lane said the state's bishops established Fidelis two years ago because they were concerned that many HMOs were unin-

terested in the low-profit Medicaid market.

"The bottom line has never been the driving force behind what we do," he said of the Catholic Church's health-care network.

Currently, Fidelis reports having a provider network that includes 120 Catholic and non-Catholic hospitals and institutions, as well as more than 10,000 physicians. Fidelis serves 60,000 Medicaid beneficiaries through its Fidelis Better-Health plan and 7,000 previously uninsured low-income children through its Fidelis TenderCare plan, Lane said.

Fidelis must be licensed by the state Health Department and county health boards, Lane added. He noted he expected approval in all five counties no later than September.

Fidelis' primary promoter in the diocese will be Unity Health System, which comprises St. Mary's and Park Ridge hospitals in Rochester, Balinsky and Lane said. Timothy R. McCormick, Unity's president, said Unity is negotiating with Fidelis and expects to make a deal no later than June.

Wagner stressed that Fidelis is designed to help patients who might otherwise be unable to obtain quality health care for a variety of reasons, including a lack of access to primary care physicians. Lane added that one reason the state wanted more Medicaid patients to have primary care physicians was to decrease their use of

more costly emergency room care.

Fidelis' origins are in a managed care plan the Brooklyn Diocese developed for its poor and disadvantaged in 1993. In 1995, the state announced it was seeking HMOs, insurance companies and health plans to provide Medicaid managed care in order to reduce costs, and give the poor more access to primary care, Lane said.

New York's bishops decided to seek state authorization to extend the license of Fidelis to operate throughout the state. Authorization was granted in 1996.

To initiate Fidelis' statewide effort, the bishops pledged a capital contribution of \$16 million. Of that figure, Balinsky noted that more than \$600,000 was contributed in roughly equal amounts by three Rochester diocesan groups — the Diocese of Rochester; Diocesan Catholic Charities; and the diocese's three Catholic hospitals — St. Joseph's in Elmira, St. James in Hornell and St. Mary's, Rochester.

St. Joseph's is located in Chemung County and St. James is located in Steuben County. Both counties are among the nine exempted by the state from mandatory Medicaid managed care due, in part, to low population density.

While officials from both hospitals said they strongly support the concept of Fidelis, they added that they'll not be joining the network in the near future.

John Collett, director of managed care at St. Joseph's, said that his hospital won't sign on with Fidelis, in part, because of the state exemption, but also because the hospital is happy with the care it provides through two voluntary managed care plans currently in place.

William Connors, executive vice president of St. James Hospital, added that Fidelis, at this stage, has no plans to operate in Steuben County.

For information on Fidelis Care, call 1-888-FIDELIS.

Recognizing

★ **Tony Alvaro and Lucille "Sis" Morgan** were recognized for their years of volunteer service to De Sales High School, Geneva, with a dinner April 3. Morgan ran the Ave Maria Shop for 23 years, and Alvaro coached the boys' varsity basketball team for 14 years.

★ **Our Lady of Mercy High School** students **Ann Yates** and **Mary Knittle** will represent New York state at the Youth and Government National Affairs Conference in North Carolina. The Mercy seniors were selected from among 450 state delegates at the annual Youth and Government conference in Albany.

★ *Prepare for the the Great Tribulation, Vol. VIII* by **John Leary**, reached sixth on the Catholic Paperback Best-sellers list in March. The book is one of a series published by the parishioner at Holy Name of Jesus Parish, Greece, recording reported messages he has received in prayer.



Greg Francis/Staff photographer

Good Friday March

Janice Rivera, 18, as the Virgin Mary leads a burial procession of Our Lady of Perpetual Help parishioners down Joseph Avenue, Rochester, the afternoon of April 10. The procession met with a procession of parishioners from St. Michael's Church and the two groups marched together. Ismal Plaza and Manuel Rodriguez carry the casket at rear. About 400 people participated. The march ended at St. Michael's Church, N. Clinton Avenue.

Appointments

Bishop Matthew H. Clark has announced the following pastoral appointments, effective June 30:

Father Robert Hansson from pastor, St. Mary's Church, Bath, to pastor, St. Margaret Mary Church, Rochester.

Father Dennis Sewar from pastor, St. Mary's Church, Waterloo, to pastor, Church of the Annunciation, Rochester.

Father Steve Kress, from pastor, St. Mary's Church, Danville, to pastor,

Holy Family Catholic Cluster, Cohoes/Danville/Perkinsville/Wayland.

Father George Heyman, from priest administrator to pastor, Immaculate Conception Church, Ithaca.

Father P.J. Ryan, from pastor, Cayuga Team Ministry Cluster, to pastor, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church, Hamlin.

EDITORS' NOTE: An earlier list of assignments contained an incorrect effective date. The correct date is June 30, 1998.

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