



Friday, September 26, 2008

Consumers Union Applauds Governor Schwarzenegger For Signing Bills That Aim to Reduce Hospital Infections

California Becomes Latest State to Require Infection Reporting and Screening of Antibiotic-Resistant MRSA Bacteria

SACRAMENTO, CA – California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger has signed a pair of bills into law designed to improve patient care and reduce hospital acquired infections. Under the new laws, California hospitals will be required to report the rates that patients suffer from certain infections, screen incoming high risk patients for antibiotic-resistant Methicillin-resistant staph aureus (MRSA) bacteria, and establish more rigorous infection control and training programs.

“Thousands of Californians die each year and many more suffer needlessly because hospitals are failing to keep them safe from infections,” said Betsy Imholz, Director of Special Projects at Consumers Union. “These new laws will help ensure that hospitals work harder to prevent infections and that the public will be able to find out which ones are doing a good job.”

The Department of Health Services estimates that as many as 9,600 Californians die from hospital infections annually. Many more Californians get sick from infections and require extra care that can result in longer stays in the hospital to recover. The Schwarzenegger administration estimates that hospital acquired infections add a staggering \$3 billion to California’s health care bill every year.

Schwarzenegger signed SB 1058 into law, which requires infection reporting and MRSA screening. Under the measure, sponsored by Senator Elaine Alquist, the Department of Health is required to establish a program for collecting data from hospitals on infection rates so that this information can then be made available to the public. California is the 25th state to require infection rate reporting by hospitals. The law requires the Department of Health to post online information about the rates of certain infections for each hospital beginning in 2011.

The new law also requires hospitals to screen patients for MRSA if they are scheduled for inpatient surgery and are considered susceptible to infection, have been in the hospital within the last 30 days, are being admitted to an intensive care or burn unit, are receiving dialysis, or have been transferred from a nursing home. The measure requires hospitals to inform patients who test positive for MRSA and to provide instructions for preventing its spread to others. California is now the 4th state to require MRSA screening of certain patients.

SB 1058 has been dubbed “Nile’s Law” in memory of Nile Moss of Gavilan Hills, CA, who died

from a MRSA infection after a visit to the hospital where he was getting an MRI. Soon after leaving the hospital, Nile developed a high fever and an x-ray revealed that he had a severe case of pneumonia. One day after being admitted to the hospital, Nile died. Following Nile's death, his mother Carole Moss worked tirelessly to call attention to the problem of hospital infections and to work for passage of SB 1058.

Nile's story was chronicled as part of *Consumer Reports Health's Cover America Tour*, which highlighted some the health care challenges Americans experience, including those harmed by the care they receive. A [video](#) about Carole Moss and her son Nile is featured on Consumers Union's Cover America Tour web site (www.CoverAmericaTour.org).

Schwarzenegger also signed SB 158, sponsored by Senator Dean Florez, which expands the responsibilities of the Department of Health's hospital infection advisory committee. The measure requires hospitals and nursing homes to improve patient safety by mandating detailed infection control training requirements for staff. It requires hospitals to develop patient safety plans and to implement facility-wide hand hygiene programs. Finally, the law requires the Department of Health to strengthen its oversight of hospital infection programs.

Consumers Union's Stop Hospital Infections Campaign (www.StopHospitalInfections.org) has been contacted by hundreds of Californians who have suffered from hospital acquired infections. Their personal stories helped propel the effort that brought about the passage of the hospital infection legislation. A letter writing campaign organized by Consumers Union generated thousands of emails to lawmakers and the Governor from consumers urging enactment of these bills.

###

Betsy Imholz – 415-431-6747
Lisa McGiffert - 512-477-4431, ext 115

©1998-2006 Consumers Union