

## NJAHHP Government Affairs Update – November 2011

### **UnitedHealthcare Proposal/Internet Hearing Aid Sales:**

**Established Coalition:** NJAHHP coordinated a coalition (NJ Hearing Coalition) of like-minded organizations to present a unified front against UnitedHealth's proposal. Presently, the coalition is comprised of NJAHHP, NJ Academy of Audiology and NJ Speech-Language-Hearing Association. NJ Academy of Otolaryngology is waiting for official directives from the national before making a decision about joining the coalition. In the meantime, the coalition is keeping NJAO apprised of its work on the issue.

### **Consumer Awareness:**

**Press Release**—On October 31, ABS issued a press release on behalf of the NJ Hearing Coalition to 270 news outlets about the . Several newspapers and online news outlets picked up the story including *Gannett News Service; Centraljersey.com; Princeton Online; 24-7 press release.*

**Website/Member Statement**—We created a joint statement for the members of the NJ Hearing Coalition to post on their websites and share with their members.

**Letters to the Editor**—We created three sample "letters to the editor" for coalition members to edit and submit to their local papers.

**Issue Brief**—Created extensive issue brief that provides an overview of the issue; highlights the problems with the UnitedHealthcare plan; and offers policy recommendations. The purpose of this brief is to set the stage for discussions with policy-makers and to ensure that all members of the coalition are presenting the issue in the same light.

**Policy Outreach:** After much research and discussion, we came to the conclusion that focusing on tightening the NJ Consumer Protection law is the best approach to limit the scope of internet sales of hearing aids in NJ. Changes to licensure would do little since HADEC only regulates those that are licensed to practice in NJ.

To that end, the NJ Hearing Coalition is meeting with Gale Simon at NJDOBI/Assistant Commissioner for Consumer Protection Services this week. The coalition has also reached out to Burt Liebman, director of legislation and regulation in the Division of Consumer Affairs, regarding this issue and he is looking into how we may be able to draft legislation to achieve our goal. While we are working on the policy side, members are also having informal conversations with legislators, building support for our position.

**Board Consolidation:** There has been no movement on the proposal to consolidate the Audiology and Speech Language Pathology Board with the Hearing Aid Dispensers Committee. We are continuing to monitor the issue and will alert the Association if the issue is introduced in the Legislature.

**A-3172/S-2823** (Requires all personal audio players distributed in New Jersey to contain warning about volume and hearing loss): NJAHHP sent a letter to Senator Vitale thanking him for introducing a Senate version of Assemblywoman Vainieri Huttel's bill A-3172. The Senate bill was referred to the Senate Commerce Committee. To date, neither bill has been posted for a vote in committee. However, the bills have picked up additional sponsors thanks to NJAHHP's involvement, which indicates growing support for the issue.

**Audiology Board Appointment:** On May 19, Governor Christie nominated Chetan S. Shah, M.D. (Titusville, Mercer County) to fill the physician's position on the Audiology and Speech Language Pathology Advisory Committee. No further action was taken on the board over the summer/fall and

the position for the audiologist position remains open. We are in close contact with the Governor's Office regarding Dr. Kennedy's appointment to this post. The office has all of Dr. Kennedy's paperwork and they tell us she is in good position for the Governor's consideration.

As per ABS' request, Dr. Kennedy met with Senator Sean Kean (R-Monmouth), ranking member of the Senate Health Committee, in July. Senator Kean wrote a letter of recommendation to the Governor on Dr. Kennedy's behalf. ABS also reached out to Senator Norcross' office (D-Camden), Dr. Kennedy's district senator, and asked his support of Dr. Kennedy's nomination to the board. Now that the election is over, ABS reached out to Senator Norcross again regarding the appointment and put in another request for his support of Dr. Kennedy.

### **Monitored other pending issues**