

New Emergency Room Policy

continued from Page 3

type care instead of utilizing the Medical Center Clinic.

She said that the hospital is in the process of educating patients to be in a mindset of the “right care, right setting.”

From May 2013 through Oct. 13, the ER of Plains Memorial Hospital in Dimmitt treated, according to the News, 1,199 patients. Of those, 947 encounters were for non-emergent or non-urgent situations. It was said at the meeting that the ER is not a place for high blood pressure checks, diabetes or mental health issues. Using the ER for such services offers no continuum of care, as the ER’s resources don’t include referring patients to specialty services or providing assistance for needed medications, as could be done in the clinic setting.

The new policy will allow a patient to receive a medical screening exam, as required by law, and if patient is deemed a non-emergent, non-urgent patient, a down payment of \$150 will be required for continued treatment. If no payment is forthcoming, an appointment at the clinic will be made for follow-up. If the patient pays the \$150, a physician will be called and treatment administered.

Rasor also told the Board that the hospital sees many out-of-county patients who are clinic-type patients and have no desire to pay for treatment. And, there are those in-county patients who use the ER and don’t pay.

CCHD averages \$1,260,000 a year in bad debt just through the ER, with the majority of that being for non-urgent, non-emergent care. Also, it was noted that insurance companies have begun denying ER claims for non-emergent visits, which puts the bill on the patient. Many people wrongly assume that since they are covered by health insurance, that their policy will call for payment of the ER bill. This is becoming less and less true.

And, Medicaid, it was noted, has also begun to decrease reimbursement to facilities for non-emergent visits to the ER. Rasor said that many facilities in the area are implementing such policies to improve care and preserve resources.

What Is Difference Between El Niño And La Niña?

Q: It’s in the news that an El Niño may form this summer. What is the difference between an El Niño and La Niña?

A: The main difference between the two involves water temperature, explains John Nielsen-Gammon <<http://atmo.tamu.edu/profile/JNielsen-Gammon>>, a weather expert at Texas A&M University. El Niño and La Niña – Spanish for “the child” – both occur in the central Pacific Ocean. “During an El Niño event, which can last almost a year, the waters in that region are warmer than usual,” he says. “The opposite occurs during a La Niña – the waters tend to be cooler than usual. But the important thing is that both events can affect weather patterns in the United States and around the world.”

Q: How do they change our weather?

A: In years when a La Niña occurs, there are often warmer and drier conditions in many areas, including Texas, Nielsen-Gammon says. “In general terms, a La Niña period means drier weather patterns for Texas. There have been numerous studies on how El Niño and La Niña affect weather patterns, and specifically, hurricanes and their intensity. Some research indicates that the sorts of hurricanes that affect Texas are more common during La Niña periods than dur-

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Deadline Looms to Get Insured, Avoid Obamacare Penalties

Open Enrollment for ACA Plans Ends March 31st

John Michaelson

AUSTIN, Texas - A major deadline looms for those Texans who want to get health insurance this year through the new ACA Marketplace. Open enrollment for plans under the Affordable Care Act (ACA) ends on March 31. Those who fail to get coverage by then will have to wait until mid-November for another chance to enroll, warned Trey Berndt with AARP Texas.

“People should know that if they enroll before March 15, the coverage can start by April 1, and if they enroll by the March 31 deadline, the coverage will start May 1. What AARP hopes is that everybody who hasn’t gotten insured will go shop the marketplace now.”

Enrollment in the marketplace insurance plans is available online at www.healthcare.gov.

Berndt said a majority of the issues that plagued the website upon launch have now been fixed, and more than 200,000 Texans have already signed up for coverage.

“Many of those have been able to get help with cost of their coverage. A lot of people are being pleasantly surprised when they get on the marketplace and see what’s available.”

There also is a positive trend in a neutral or El Niño year. We do know that an El Niño can last up to 18 months and it can influence weather everywhere, so when one forms, there is naturally a lot of interest in what will happen.”

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Weather Whys is a service of the Department of Atmospheric Sciences <<http://atmo.tamu.edu/atmo-home>> at Texas A&M University.

among young adults, who don’t always realize the need for health insurance, he added.

“Like a lot of us when we were young, they may think they’re invincible. A lot of those guys are starting to shop around and realize that with some of the extra help to lower the cost of insurance, they can get affordable coverage.”

Estimates prior to the imple-

mentation of the ACA put Texas at about 6 million people with no health insurance, the highest number of any state. Those who do not have coverage in place this year could face a tax penalty, as part of the ACA individual mandate.

Enrollment is available online at www.healthcare.gov or by calling 1-800-318-2596.

Annual Meeting

**Thursday,
March 27, 2014**

**Senior Citizens Center
619 SE Second St., Tulia**

Registration and Buffet Supper: 6:30 p.m.
(For members and guests)

There will be gift and door prizes - must be present to win.

Business Meeting: 7:15 p.m.

Three directors will be elected.

Position 1

**Dwain Strange
Alan Monroe**

Position 2

**Mace Middleton
Jeff Harrell**

Position 3

**Ralph ‘Zeke’ Frost
Tyler Evans**



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