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New Jersey Poison Information and Education Services

Transition Report Fact Sheet

In preparation for his new administration, Governor Christie appointed a health care transition team to propose potential areas of savings in the upcoming state budget. On Friday, January 22, 2010, with the issuance of the health care transition team report, NJPIES (New Jersey Poison Information and Education Services) was alerted that its funding and future existence were in grave danger. Based on erroneous information, the report suggested:

- The possible elimination of the Poison Control Center
- Internet services are sufficient over personal consultations for poison information
- NJPIES is supported in large part by hospitals through fees on emergency department visits
- The State could consolidate with adjacent poison centers and share services with either Philadelphia or New York
- Eliminating the center would save the state money

The Facts:

- NJPIES was created by public law passed in 1982 requiring the Department of Health to develop a drug and poison information program.
- The Internet is replete with misinformation, and physicians, particularly those in emergency departments, cannot and should not spend precious diagnostic time searching for facts that they could access immediately through a personal consult with a trained colleague on the NJPIES 24/7 hotline.
- Prior to its existence, service was decentralized across 32 hospitals without any tracking of potential statewide trends or emerging medical clusters.
- Hospitals provide 1/3 of the Center's funding, and have been willing to do in order to save funds in providing duplicative services. NJPIES is a consolidated, statewide service.
- There has been no indication that adjacent centers would be willing or able to take New Jersey calls, and certainly would not consider so without direct funding.
- Other states have explored closing their centers, finding that subsequent increased use of hospital and emergency services cost the states far more than the operation of their original Poison Center. Alabama closed a center only to reopen it soon after hospital costs skyrocketed.
- Elimination of NJPIES would cost the state money in immediate use of more expensive emergency services from ambulance usage to increased ER visits and longer hospital stays.

- The state provides only 20% of the Center's funding. Total operating revenue comes from a combination of state funds, federal agencies, local hospital fees, the CDC (Centers for Disease Control) and other assorted grants that all require state funding as a prerequisite for support.

In summary:

- **NJPIES saves lives.** Literally, as New Jersey's Medical "On-Star" service, it provides first response, timely intervention, frequently for children as well as adults and senior citizens.
- **NJPIES is a bargain to NJ taxpayers.** The National Public Services Institute found that for poison centers provide a 1:7 ROI and save millions of dollars each year in avoiding unnecessary hospital and emergency care services and streamlining those services when they are needed. A subsequent study by the Pacific Institute of Research and Evaluation found that for each \$3 spent on poison center services, \$290 is saved in medical spending. In New Jersey, conservative estimates are that NJPIES saves NJ \$9.5 million annually both in avoided hospital visits and ambulance calls, and shortened hospital stays.
- **The need is greater during a Recession not less.** The center handles 200 calls a day, many from the state's uninsured, out-of-work, and most in-need.
- **The Internet is not a substitute for real medical care.** The Internet is replete with misinformation. Correct poison intervention requires the skills of trained toxicologists. During the last 5 years, the time of greatest Internet growth, NJPIES has seen a dramatic increase in call volume from hospitals.
- **NJPIES supplements hospital care.** The NJ hospital system is in crisis, yet the report calls for the elimination of a key service that provides cost-effective public health care outside the cost-inflated hospital system. NJPIES aides ED doctors with medical diagnosis and treatment plans, while handling less acute cases at home, thereby, keeping a substantial number of cases from ever reaching over-capacity ERs around the state.
- **NJPIES is a leader in children's health.** Medical Executive Director Steven Marcus is the state's preeminent expert in lead poisoning and children's public health issues. Trained first as a pediatrician, he is an adamant proponent for sensible legislation that protects the rights of children including the need for better regulations against lead poisoning in homes and schools and locked medicine cabinets to avoid unnecessary home poisonings.

NJPIES is more than a call center.

- It is a centralized repository for medical trend tracking and uncovering trends or clusters of medical abnormalities.
- It is a key resource in counter-terrorism services, particularly those related to bio-hazards.
- It is a training and professional education center for medical residents studying pediatric, family practice, and emergency medicine throughout the state. NJPIES also provides continuing education programs to hospital emergency medicine, medicine and pediatric departments throughout the state.
- Through a federal grant, NJPIES education staff delivers thousands of educational programs to school age and senior citizen groups throughout the state.