

Letter from the Assistant Secretary

For those of you who don't know me, please let me introduce myself. I am Karen Jensen, the new Assistant Secretary of Health Systems Quality Assurance.



Secretary Mary Selecky appointed me to this position in August. I want to thank her for giving me this opportunity. I am proud to work with such a committed and bright group of people.

I have had the pleasure of working with this division for many years. I came to the division in 2000 as the Attorney General's Office legal advisor for Health Professions Quality Assurance. In 2004, I joined the Department of Health as a supervising staff attorney in the legal unit and later moved to the Assistant Secretary's Office as the policy director and legislative coordinator.

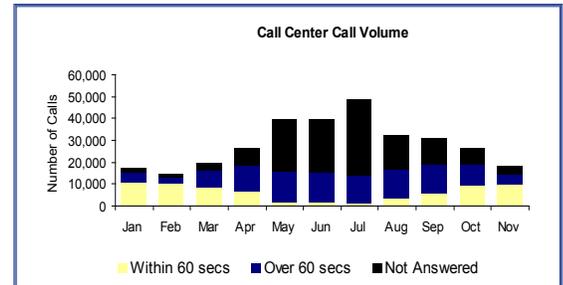
Working in so many areas of the division has given me a strong appreciation of your hard work. I look forward to working with all of you. My door is always open. Please feel free to call or [e-mail](#) me.

This is our first quarterly update to you. It focuses on the business we have in common, including emerging issues, challenges and joint projects. Please contact me if you have any suggestions to help us better communicate with you. The newsletter is posted on our divisional page of the agency [Web site](#).

Karen Ann Jensen, Assistant Secretary
Health Systems Quality Assurance
Washington Department of Health

Featured Performance Measure

This measure shows the rise and fall of the call volume during an 11-month period. The increase in call traffic started with the introduction of our new licensing system.



The addition of new professions and fee increases created more questions, nearly tripling the number of calls between January and July. Staff worked hard to get the calls answered. In July, only around 19 percent of calls were answered. That percentage has jumped to about 80 percent, with 59 percent of those calls answered within 60 seconds.

Updates

Department Sets Strategies for Injury and Violence Prevention: In 2008, the Department of Health and its partners created the state's first [comprehensive guide](#) to prevent injuries and violence. In 2006, injuries claimed the lives of 3,700 people. More than 78,000 were hospitalized.

New Heart Rules Expand Patient Access and Maintain Safety: Washington has [new rules](#) for procedures to widen narrowed or blocked blood vessels in the heart. These rules set standards for hospitals to do elective procedures without also having an open-heart surgery program. Communities will be able to recruit new doctors and retain those who might have left to perform the services.

Federal Background Checks Required for Out-of-State Applicants: The department is piloting the use of [federal fingerprint-based background checks](#) for certain health care applicants. The pilot focuses on applicants from out-of-state and some with a criminal history in Washington. The Department of Health notifies applicants who must undergo this background check.

New Professions Bring Flood of Applicants: As of mid January, nearly 11,000 people had applied for credentials in three new professions: dental assistants, physical therapist assistants, and athletic trainers. The department had approved about 90 percent of the credentials and was [working closely](#) with the remaining applicants.

(Updates Continued)

Work Starts on New Home Care Aide Professions: The Department of Health and Department of Social and Health Services started work to create a new credential for home care aides. The profession was created by state Initiative 1029, passed by voters last fall. The state health department will regulate credentials and develop and administer an examination. The profession is expected to be on-line in 2012.

Death with Dignity Rules in Process: The department adopted [rules](#) February 20 for the Death with Dignity Act. The new rules go into effect March 5. More than 200 people provided public comment during the rule adoption process. Initiative 1000, modeled on the Oregon Death with Dignity Act, was approved by voters in November. The rules cover reporting requirements for health care providers, confidentiality, and qualifications of witnesses for patients at long-term care facilities.

By the Numbers...

In calendar 2008, our division and partners:

- *Processed a record 56,660 applications for health professions.*
- *Investigated 3,910 complaints on health care professionals and 223 complaints on facilities.*
- *Initiated legal action against 1,456 health care professionals and facilities.*
- *Entered more summary suspensions (71) than in any prior year.*
- *Summarily suspended 14 hotels and motels compared to 10 for the entire 05-07 biennium.*
- *Placed 202 health care providers through visa, recruitment, scholarship, loan repayment and volunteer programs.*
- *Initiated more than 350 contracts to fund local trauma, health care and prevention programs.*
- *Finalized a five-year strategic plan for the state's EMS and Trauma System.*

New HSQA Web Portal

The [HSQA page](#) on the agency Internet has a new look. The portal is a big improvement for customers and stakeholders. Some of the new features are comprehensive complaint pages for [health professions](#) and [facilities](#), an [application status](#) page where applicants see the progress of their applications and information on processing times, a page about [fees for all professions](#), and [performance measures](#). The performance measures currently focus on the professional boards and commissions. New measures will be added in the future. The look and layout of the site are based on user statistics and other recommendations. Internal usability tests were also completed to ensure the site is easy to navigate and user friendly. Please continue to look for new features and updates.

2008 In Review

Department Launches New Licensing and Enforcement System: We now have a modern system to license and regulate the state's 350,000 health professionals and facilities. The Integrated Licensing and Regulatory System (ILRS) launched in February. It replaced five antiquated systems. The system automated manual processes and meets audit standards. It will also allow us to build on-line application, renewal and payment systems for our customers.

New Rules on Medical Marijuana: At the direction of the legislature, the department defined the maximum amount of [medical marijuana](#) a patient may possess and completed a report on distribution methods. The department did an extensive analysis on practices in other states and held four workshops. There was great public and media interest. The rules allow up to 24 ounces and 15 plants. They took effect in November.

Legislature Approved Fee Increases: Fifty-two professions needed fee increases to operate in the black or comply with new legislation. The department used the formal process and received and reviewed public comment before finalizing the rule. The fee increase caused some backlog because of the short time between finalizing the rules and sending out renewal notices.

Rural Communities Offering High Quality Services: Forks Community Hospital used the Health Systems Resources grant program to help keep obstetric services in its rural community. The hospital sent its doctor to Swedish Hospital Medical Center in Seattle for training and experiences not often available in Forks. This success led to a new program to allow other hospitals to get training. Three hospitals, Lourdes, Sunnyside and Whidbey General, worked with larger hospitals to improve service.

Major Spokane Hospital Sale Approved: In August, the department approved the sale of Deaconess Medical Center and Valley Hospital and Medical Center in Spokane to Tennessee-based Community Health Systems. The hospitals moved from non-profit to private ownership. The department set conditions to protect the community.