



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** **Monday, June 14, 2010**  
*COMP Contact: Steve Hopcraft, 916/457-5546; [steve@hopcraft.com](mailto:steve@hopcraft.com)*

**Physician to Governor:  
Cutting Medi-Cal Drug Treatment Threatens Lives;  
Would Force Doctors to Withdraw Medically-Necessary Medication**

Sacramento – Dr. John McCarthy, M.D., a psychiatrist and Medical Director of Bi-Valley Medical Clinic in Sacramento, today released a letter to Governor Schwarzenegger alerting him that eliminating the drug Medi-Cal program threatens the lives of hundreds of disabled patients. Dr. McCarthy is the physician for about 300 patients on Social Security Income (SSI) disability whose health and lives would be endangered if drug Medi-Cal were eliminated, and they were forced to withdraw from methadone treatment. Dr. McCarthy wrote the governor “to assure that you are aware of these life-threatening medical consequences.”

“Opiate withdrawal is a very disabling process. It literally causes a seizure in multiple areas of the brain and this puts severe stress on all body organs, especially the heart, lungs, and liver,” wrote Dr. McCarthy. “Those that have serious medical or psychiatric conditions, as these SSI disabled patients all do, are at very high risk for catastrophic medical events. Many are far too ill to survive.” It is certain that some disabled patients would die if drug Medi-Cal treatment were ended.

Dr. McCarthy wrote the governor that ending drug Medi-Cal treatment for his patients could violate a physician’s morality and medical ethics. “We physicians cannot be asked to harm our patients by withdrawing a medically necessary medication.”

*The entire letter is included below.*

The Honorable Arnold Schwarzenegger

Governor of the State of California  
State Capitol Building  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Governor Schwarzenegger,

I am writing to you on behalf of disabled patients currently being treated in the methadone treatment system. I am a psychiatrist and addiction medicine specialist in Sacramento, and I am the physician for about 300 patients on SSI disability whose health and lives would be endangered if they were forced to withdraw from methadone, if drug Medi-Cal was eliminated.

Opiate withdrawal is a very disabling process, even if done slowly. It literally causes a seizure in multiple areas of the brain and this puts severe stress on all body organs, especially the heart, lungs, and liver. Those that have serious medical or psychiatric conditions, as these SSI disabled patients all do, are at very high risk for catastrophic medical events. Many are far too ill to survive. We physicians cannot be asked to harm our patients by withdrawing a medically necessary medication.

Although I am keenly aware of the dire economic problems you are dealing with, the issue at stake is moral and ethical.

Although you will be advised of other adverse economic and social consequences of ending drug Medi-Cal, I am writing to assure that you are aware of these life-threatening medical consequences. Methadone treatment is a specialty area of medicine and not well understood. I hope this letter helps to put the most critical medical issues in perspective and that you will find a way of continuing this medication for the thousands of these patients throughout California who depend on it. Thank you for your kindness in reading this letter.

Sincerely,  
John McCarthy, M.D., ABAM  
Executive/Medical Director  
Bi-Valley Medical Clinic, Sacramento  
916-974-8090

(end)