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**CATHOLIC HOSPITALS ADOPT POLICIES TO PROTECT UNINSURED PATIENTS;  
STEPS INCLUDE REDUCED RATES, ZERO-INTEREST PAYMENT PLANS**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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**Sacramento, CA** – Uninsured patients whose family income is at or below three times the federal poverty level will get a break on health care costs under a new policy adopted today by Catholic hospitals in California. Under the new policy, families will be charged rates no higher than those paid by Medicare, Medicaid (Medi-Cal) and other government health programs. Interest-free payment plans also will be offered, along with other kinds of financial assistance.

“There’s been an on-going debate over whether or not federal Medicare guidelines would allow us to make these changes,” said William Cox, president of the Alliance of Catholic Health Care, the association representing Catholic hospitals in California. “It has taken a year, but we believe we have crafted a policy that we feel advances the mission of Catholic health care, while staying within federal rules,” said Cox. “Alliance members believe that low-income uninsured patients should not be billed full hospital charges when financially better-off insured patients generally receive substantial discounts.”

The policies adopted by the Alliance of Catholic Health Care include:

1. The payment California Catholic hospitals accept from patients who are uninsured and who are at or below 300 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL) will not exceed the payment the hospitals would receive for the same service from one of the following public payers: Medicare, or Medi-Cal, or Workers Compensation;
2. Wage garnishments or liens on homes will not be used to collect unpaid bills from qualifying families;
3. Extended payment plans offered by the hospital in settling the bills of such patients will be interest free;
4. Unpaid bills will not be sent to outside collection agencies as long as the patient is cooperating in efforts to settle the bill;
5. Each hospital will make known its policies on the availability of charity care and discounted care for low-income uninsured patients, as well as financial assistance for “underinsured” patients; and
6. Each hospital and or system will post on its website, or otherwise make available to the public on a reasonable basis, its financial assistance policy, the cost of charity care and the unreimbursed costs of care it provides to beneficiaries of government programs.

The Alliance Board adopted the new policies in recognition of the Catholic health care mission to serve and advocate on behalf of the economically disadvantaged. As part of an effort initiated by the Alliance, the California Healthcare Association recently adopted a similar policy.

The Board of Directors of the Alliance of Catholic Health Care represents California’s Catholic health care systems and hospitals. There are 61 California Catholic and community-  
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based affiliated hospitals. They represent nearly 16 percent of all California acute care inpatient hospitals. The following Catholic health care systems are located in California and represented on the Alliance Board of Directors: Catholic Healthcare West (San Francisco), Daughters of Charity Health Care System (Los Altos Hills), Providence Health System (Southern California) and the St. Joseph Health System (Orange).

A copy of the protocol is attached.