

National Accountable Care Organization Congress Deemed a Success



By *Dianne Glover, MPH*

More than one thousand executives gathered in Los Angeles and online to hear leading healthcare experts from across the nation at the National Accountable Care Organization Congress which was held in late October. The Congress, which was co-produced by the California Association of Physician Groups (CAPG) and the Integrated Healthcare Association (IHA), was designed to examine specifics about how physician groups, hospitals and policymakers can work together to form health care organizations that are held accountable for aligning financial incentives with patient interests and improving the quality and efficiency of patient care. According to CAPG's President and CEO, Don Crane, "The Conference exceeded our expectations in terms of timely content, information exchange and national attendance."

Leading policymakers, experts, and ACO

implementers led sessions to provide insights for understanding and implementing ACOs across the country. Highlights of the Congress included speeches by Elliott S. Fisher, MD, MPH, the Director of Population Health and Policy and the Director of the Center for Population Health at the Dartmouth Institute for Health Policy. Dr. Fisher discussed organization and implementation of ACO, and emphasized the importance of correctly messaging ACOs to the consumer. Peter Lee, the Director of Delivery System Reform at the US Department of Health & Human Services was interviewed on the spot by Susan Dentzer, Editor-in-Chief of Health Affairs. Although Lee had little to report in terms of the ACO regulations which are due out early next year, he urged attendees to become involved now in the creation of the regulations. Lee challenged the audience stating, "You have an opportunity to shape the direction of federal policy. Get involved."

ACOs have come in the spotlight due to provisions in Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act which rely on accountable care organizations to bring together providers and reward them for improving quality while controlling costs. Since California physician groups have been practicing in the coordinated, delegated model for many years, CAPG and IHA conducted this Congress to learn from the challenges and triumphs of the California model when im-



Peggy Frank at Ventegra's exhibit booth (CAPG partner)

plementing ACOs in the rest of the country.

Tom Williams, IHA's Executive Director stated, "We are very pleased with the success of the ACO Congress. Many of the conference attendees were effusive in their praise of its content during the conference and this was further expressed in the written evaluations. I am convinced that the collaboration of CAPG and IHA, each contributing its unique capabilities and enthusiastic staff to the development of the conference, was the key to its success. It was this combined effort, pooling the resources and creativity of both organizations that provided the capacity to develop such a rich curriculum in short order. The conference provided a forum for members of the California delivery system to understand ACO concepts, but equally important it highlighted the strengths of the California delivery system to policy leaders throughout the nation."

Although the Congress provided a plethora of information about preparation for and implementation of ACO's, the bottom line is that there are still more questions than answers. As organizations start preparation for forming ACO, all await the regulations which will be released in early 2011. ■



Don Crane, President & CEO of CAPG participates in a healthcare panel discussion (far left)