

# SCPMG Celebrates Its “First 50 Years”

By Chad Fifer

*Although the Southern California Permanente Medical Group (SCPMG) was officially “born” on January 1, 1953, it did not spring to life in a single day. The guiding principles of the organization took decades to develop—decades of stops and starts, of successes and failures. Above all, it took the persistence, extraordinary vision, and dreams of two men: Sidney Garfield, MD, and Raymond Kay, MD.*

*Drs Garfield and Kay were just beginning their medical careers when they met in the early 1930s at Los Angeles County General Hospital (now the Los Angeles County/USC Medical Center). The origins of SCPMG may well have been right then and there. As Dr Kay would later say, “Many fundamental concepts of the Southern California Permanente Medical Group stem from the early experience and reactions some of us had while young physicians in training at the Los Angeles County General Hospital.” Dr Garfield pioneered the health care delivery system we now know as Kaiser Permanente, while Dr Kay became the driving force behind the formation of SCPMG. (Excerpted from “SCPMG . . . The First 50 Years,” a historical account of the Medical Group by Teri Allen, to be printed later this year.)*



It was 1949 when Ray Kay, MD, left his job at Los Angeles County General Hospital, moved to Fontana, and became the Medical Director of the Kaiser Permanente Southern

California Region. A mere four years later, the small group of Fontana physicians employed by Sidney R Garfield, MD, and Associates became the partnership of physicians known as SCPMG. On January 1, 1953, 13 physicians signed the first SCPMG Partnership Agreement, creating an organization of partners who co-owned and governed the medical group. During the early years, Dr Kay said, “We dreamed of a form of practice that we hoped would meet the needs of both patients and physicians.”<sup>1</sup>



Drs Sidney Garfield and Ray Kay prepare for a game of ping pong circa 1950.

SCPMG has grown into an organization of approximately 3700 partner and associate physicians working at 12 medical centers and more than 100 medical offices in the KP Southern California Region. The

organization and its leadership have proved remarkably resilient during the last 50 years by continuing to provide high-quality, convenient, and affordable health care in spite of various internal and external challenges.

In the 1950s, SCPMG's leaders took on the challenge of launching a new, innovative organization in a less-than-favorable health care environment. They faced bashing from the “established” medical community as well as pressure from unions and the KP organization itself. In 1956, SCPMG became the first medical group within KP to sign a medical service agreement, establishing a contractual partnership with the Kaiser Foundation Health Plan and Kaiser Foundation Hospitals. This agreement cemented a healthy relationship between the medical group and the Health Plan that both still enjoy.

The 1960s saw SCPMG dealing with the pressures of growth and expansion, as KP's Panorama City and Bellflower medical centers opened and construction began on KP West Los Angeles. In the 1970s, this expansion continued—SCPMG began serving members in San Diego and Orange County while coping with the emergence of government regulation and managed care competition.

Increased competition from these managed care companies, coupled with escalating health care costs, threatened the stability of SCPMG in the '80s and '90s, but the organization weathered the storm. By



**Chad Fifer** is a communications specialist with SCPMG. He is currently the editor of *Laboratory Matters*, a contributor to *Partners News*, and a writer on various special projects. E-mail: [chad.l.fifer@kp.org](mailto:chad.l.fifer@kp.org).

improving its access, service, and efficiency, SCPMG separated itself from the pack and outlasted many of its rivals, to become the successful medical group that KP members continue to rely on today.

"Over the last 50 years, SCPMG has proven to be a very durable organization of physicians; and we are an important part of the infrastructure of Southern California health care," said Oliver Goldsmith, MD, SCPMG Medical Director. "I'd be hard pressed to find a group of physicians more singularly committed to their program and the patients they serve."

This year marks SCPMG's 50th Anniversary—a time to celebrate the history of its partnership, longevity of its mission, dedication to its patients, and the strength of group practice. Several activities are taking place throughout the rest of the year to commemorate the anniversary and to thank physicians, providers, and employees for their commitment to medical excellence. "SCPMG ... The First 50 Years," a video chronicling the challenges, triumphs, and people who left a lasting imprint on the medical group, will be available later this year. Many local medical center and regional events are also being held this fall to mark the occasion.



A patient is checked out of the Long Beach Medical Office Building, which served members until the early '60s.

### SCPMG "The First 50 Years" Celebration

This nationwide anniversary celebration for SCPMG Partner and Associate Physicians as well as retired partner physicians will feature guest speaker Jerome Groopman, MD. Dr Groopman is an esteemed physician and writer on doctor-patient relationships for *The New Yorker* and author of *The Measure of Our Days*, which inspired the critically acclaimed TV series *Gideon's Crossing*. The program, followed by a reception, will have been held on Sunday, October 26, 2003, at the Pasadena Civic Auditorium.

### 50th Anniversary Web Site

The 50th anniversary is also being commemorated within the pages of the SCPMG Physician Intranet portal (<http://scpmgphysician.kp.org>). This site features:

- historical accounts of the people and places that shaped the history of SCPMG;
- anniversary messages from Oliver Goldsmith, MD, SCPMG Medical Director, and Jeffrey Weisz, MD, SCPMG Medical Director-elect;
- an SCPMG Anniversary Events Calendar which includes KP Southern California regional and local celebrations; and



Dr William Kandel examines a patient at the Glendale Medical Office Building circa 1960. KP left this location for a larger one in Burbank in 1961.

- a "Tell Your SCPMG Story" section which enables physicians and staff members to submit stories of their personal experiences in SCPMG, for example, why they joined the medical group, important milestones, proudest moments, working wisdom gained, unforgettable faces, and more.

"As we move forward into our next 50 years, the medical group will continue to operate on its core principles: Permanente Medicine and a sense of compassion and of caring for our patients," said Dr Weisz. "We are responsible for putting the *KP Promise* into action every day in our medical facilities and administrative offices. I would like to thank the SCPMG people of yesteryear and those of today for working diligently to carry out our tradition of quality medical care." ❖

### Reference

1. Kay, RM. Historical review of the Southern California Permanente Medical Group. Los Angeles (CA): Southern California Permanente Medical Group, 1979. p 3.