

# WELCOME TO THE FUTURE

**T**his special section of *Health Progress* was conceived as a section devoted to long-term facility care. But it quickly became clear that the theme needed to expand, to focus not only on a single aspect of senior services, but on the future of senior services overall.

We are about to face a long parade of the largest group ever to reach old age in the United States. While traditional long-term care — nursing facilities and assisted living — surely remain an option for people no longer able to remain in their homes, it is becoming clear that a diversity of services with a focus on home and community-based care is the future of long term care. As Bon Secours' James Higgins, author of the lead article in the section, noted in a talk at the Catholic Health Assembly in June, seniors enter the health care system at many different levels, a process that often begins well before they are ready for long-term care.

Person-centered, age-appropriate, high-quality care in hospitals can reduce the time seniors spend in hospitals and perhaps forestall a need for long-term institutional care.

That is because studies show that the more time seniors spend in hospitals, the more their overall health is likely to decline. Further, rising seniors are making it clear that they intend to remain in their homes as long as possible. A stronger focus on wellness and more funding for preventive care are measures that will serve that end, as will technological advances that will make homes a safer place for seniors to be.

Finally, when seniors do enter the health care system, more attention to coordination of care and communication at every transition point will help to avoid gaps that too often are detrimental to health and well-being.

Each of these issues is among those explored in the pages that follow. We welcome your reaction and news of how your organization is getting ready for the future.

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Reprinted from *Health Progress*, November - December 2009.  
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