

A New Vantage Point



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As I settle into my new role here at the Catholic Health Association, where I find myself surrounded by friendly and intelligent people, I realize that, whatever experience and gifts I might bring to this job, I have a lot to learn. In this issue, for instance, which has been largely put together by my predecessor, Scott McConaha — the face you are used to seeing on this page — a wealth of information, much of it new to me, illuminates the challenging and complex area of community benefit, and the increasing pressures on Catholic health care institutions to evaluate and measure their ongoing contributions to public health.

I arrived at CHA just in time to attend the 2008 Catholic Health Assembly in San Diego in late June and then, on its heels, a conference called “Making an Impact: Evidence-Based Community Benefit,” sponsored by CHA, VHA Inc., and the Saint Louis University School of Public Health. In break-out sessions at the assembly, I heard inspiring stories about programs under way at Catholic health care institutions to promote public health, and at the conference, I learned about the increasing professionalism and accountability health care organizations are bringing to their community benefit programs.

As CHA’s Julie Trocchio and Saint Louis University’s Connie Evashwick write in the introduction to this issue’s special section (on page 9), “community benefit programs are maturing, moving from ‘random acts of kindness’ to being grounded in evidence.” The many fine articles Scott has rounded up for this issue reflect CHA’s strong commitment to supporting Catholic hospitals in their efforts to ground their community benefit programs in solid evidence of the social good they provide.

My background for this new editorial role includes long experience as a reporter and writer in the field of religion, for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, *Religion News Service*, and *National Catholic Reporter*, where most recently I served as executive editor. In the process of writing numerous articles in the field of bioethics, I have been enriched by in-depth interviews and long conversations with professionals who work in the field. Those include some good friends whose support I often relied on while earning a doctorate in historical theology at Saint Louis University in the 1980s. Recently, I served for five years as director of communications for the Religious of the Sacred Heart and, from that privileged vantage point, deepened my understanding of the contributions religious women have made, and continue to make, to our church, our Catholic institutions, and our world.

Here in my new office, I find myself at another privileged vantage point. I look forward to the challenges ahead: to working closely with CHA staff, to building on the outstanding work of my predecessors, to working with knowledgeable and talented authors to bring you, our readers, more of the informative, enriching and inspirational material you have come to expect from *Health Progress*. ■