

# Health Care, Get Ready. Seniors Are on Parade



**BY PAMELA  
SCHAEFFER, Ph.D.**

*Editor*

pschaeffer@  
chausa.org

Over the past weekend I went to Springfield, Mo., to hear two-time U.S. poet laureate Billy Collins talk and (mostly) read his poetry. There was a lot of laughter. His poetry is often funny. So were his remarks. One thing he said (and I quote him accurately, if not precisely): “As I tell my writing students, the hardest thing about being a poet is trying to decide what to do with the other 22 and a half hours in the day.”

The statement — the leisure it implied — was certainly a contrast to the situation here at *Health Progress* in the past few weeks, where we have been busy about putting out one of the largest issues in a while: 92 pages on the future of senior services.

There is a lot here to read, but what consoles those of us who packaged so many articles, so many words, is that they apply to everyone. We may not all be involved in pastoral care. We may not all be mission directors or ethicists (thinking of some themes of recent issues.) But every one of us is on a journey into the future, aging as we go.

This issue is about that future. On a personal level, it is about what we might find when we get there. On a health care leadership level, it is about how we will make it a better place for ourselves and those who are making the journey with us. As our authors note, seniors are entering and will continue to enter the health care system at every point, and the more their special needs can be understood and addressed, the better off each of us and our society will be.

It may be though, that as important as that message is, the most important words you hold in your hands are in Sister Carol Keehan’s opening message about health care reform. That’s because without significant reform, no matter what else we do, the future for many in our midst is sure to be grim.

I end where I began, with Billy Collins — a few lines extracted from “The Parade” in his *Nine Horses* (New York: Random House, 2002):

How exhilarating it was to march  
Along the great boulevards ...

So many of us streaming along —  
All of humanity, really ...

How endless it seemed until we veered  
Off the broad turnpike  
Into a pasture of high grass,  
Heading toward the dizzying cliffs of mortality.

As the authors in the following pages remind us: Time to get ready. The marchers are on the way. ■

# Health Progress®

---

Reprinted from *Health Progress*, November - December 2009.  
Copyright © 2009 by The Catholic Health Association of the United States

---