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Transforming Society

Transforming American society is not a new endeavor. The women and men religious who founded Catholic healthcare in this country were transforming society by bringing healing to those who needed it, wherever they were. But in those earlier times—before high-tech medicine pushed us toward a healthcare “industry”—it was easier to see how an organization could perform the role of a transforming agent. The purpose of the Catholic health ministry—to be a means by which the Church responds to the call to continue Jesus’ healing presence in the world—has never changed. But today, with various political, business, and social complexities all making claims on resources, leaders must make difficult choices.

To get a handle on exactly what the ministry is up against, we asked an outspoken social critic—Princeton economist Uwe Reinhardt—and the president of a major health system—Donald Brennan—about the Catholic health ministry’s ability to continue to influence society. Their interviews (p. 26 and p. 30, respectively) are challenging reading for the new year!

One way a healthcare organization can get maximum bang for its bucks is to pool resources with others. *Health Progress* staffer Ann Stockho, on p. 34, describes how Building Healthier Communities, a creative initiative of Mercy Housing, Inc., and McAuley Institute collaborates with hospitals, health centers, community development groups, government agencies, Catholic Charities, and others to revitalize distressed communities.

In an equally innovative move, St. John Health System in Detroit established an Urban and Community Health division to provide a structured approach to improving health status through strategic partnerships. For an exciting look at what the young division is accomplishing, read Stephanie Hearn’s article on p. 28.

One of the most important ways that Catholic healthcare can bring about change is through its everyday treatment of patients and families. *Health Progress* wants to help organizations share ideas for making care truly patient centered. In each issue, we will ask you to answer, via a fax-back questionnaire or e-mail, a specific question about how you focus on the people you serve. We’ll publish your answers in *HP* and post them on CHA’s website (www.chausa.org). This issue’s question is on p. 19.

Rev. Michael D. Place, CHA’s newly named president and CEO, recently remarked on the Catholic health ministry’s position in a society in which the purpose and form of healthcare are evolving. Fr. Place noted that Catholic healthcare, building on its strengths of the past, has both the responsibility and opportunity to influence the evolution of healthcare in the United States in order to promote human dignity and the common good. Please take part in seizing that opportunity and let us hear from you soon.

End of an Era

With this issue, Jane Hiebert-White ends her 11-year stint as *Health Progress*’s health policy columnist. We know readers will miss her thorough coverage as much as we on the staff will miss working with her. Our thanks to Jane for always giving readers interesting analyses, for never missing a deadline, for making our work easy by writing so clearly and well, and for being a true friend to all of us.

Note: *HP* will continue to focus on health policy. Watch for a column by CHA’s Fish Brown in the next issue.