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Judy Cassidy
EDITOR

Why Catholic Healthcare?

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Why is Catholic healthcare important? If the Catholic health ministry disappeared, would there be significant consequences? If so, for whom? Being able to answer these questions is more important today than at any time in the past. Leaders have expressed a growing desire to understand the ministry's history and the value of mission as they struggle with difficult choices: how to serve the patient as well as the bottom line, how to form partnerships, how to care for vulnerable people in a society that values individualism over the common good.



This new attitude is a change from the norm of just a decade ago, when sponsors and others were somewhat reticent about proclaiming the distinctiveness of their ministry. Now people who have worked in the ministry for a long time want a clearer understanding of why the Catholic mission is necessary, and those who are new to Catholic healthcare want to understand the beliefs on which the ministry is based. And it has been a long time since anyone has tried to tell me, with a touch of ennui, that *Health Progress's* focus on Catholic identity makes it a journal for theologians and sponsors alone.

This issue of *Health Progress* proves that leaders are not relegating the concerns of Catholic identity to the attic. The writers in this issue take you far beyond dry theoretical concepts. No one has thought about the practical implications of Catholic identity more carefully than Sr. Jean deBlois. She describes the commitments mission requires of Catholic healthcare organizations and the ways these commitments can—and should—be used to gain advantage in the marketplace. Rev. Kevin O'Rourke proposes an exciting role for Catholic healthcare organizations in influencing the U.S. healthcare system and, equally important, in shaping their operations so that they make values concrete.

One paramount value of the Catholic health ministry is the common good. Sr. Mary Ann Dillon provides what readers have asked for—an article that shows how a healthcare system based on the common good would look. And Sr. Marian Louwagie and Milt Hertel tell how a Catholic hospital's values have influenced the operations of an ecumenical health system.

In her "Final Say," Ann Neale urges conversation and reflection among boards, senior managers, and clinical staff as necessary for maintaining a wholesome balance between mission and business, concerns that must not become mutually exclusive if Catholic healthcare is to flourish.

Fostering the conversation, CHA's 82nd Catholic Health Assembly—"Fidelity to Mission: Our Strategic Strength"—will bring together Neale's "key groups." Sr. deBlois, Fr. O'Rourke, and Charles Dougherty will all speak at the assembly on topics related to their articles in this issue. Don't miss this opportunity to hear them and join the conversation (see program on pp. 17-19).

