

Resetting Our Sights



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

Editor

pschaeffer@
chausa.org

As human beings, we often find it hard to get it right. Though we have high ideals and solid intentions, “mission statements” to guide our actions and resolutions to do better, it can be tough for us to hit our marks. With that in mind, in this issue based on the theme of the 2009 Catholic Health Assembly, “In Our Hands: Changing Ourselves, Our Communities, Our Nation,” a myriad of articles revolve around the theme of improving our aim.

Franciscan Br. Dan Sulmasy, MD, Ph.D., whose inspiring talk for the assembly is presented here in full, shares a frustrating personal experience to illustrate what happens when people in health care, permeated by the secular air we all breathe, simply play by the rules. They may help a hospital to function efficiently, but they leave it devoid of heart.

Ethicists Michael Panicola, Ph.D., and Ron Hamel, Ph.D., review a more specific problem in the health care field: the recent history of questionable and even illegal physician-industry ties — ties that, at worst, may negatively affect our well-being and, at least, undermine our trust in the professionals we rely on to heal us or guide us to better health.

In a third article demonstrating our human failings, health policy expert Emily Friedman writes about the future of health care reform (though she dislikes the term) by reflecting on our poor record as Americans when it comes to learning from past mistakes. History may be a good teacher, but is anyone paying attention?

Fortunately, the Christian story that frames our work in Catholic health care is threaded through with the reality of our humanness and our propensity to miss the mark. Our role in that story is not to get it right every time. We just have to acknowledge our shortcomings, reset our sights and try again.

Fortunately, too, there are aids. Theologian Sr. Catherine Vincie, RSHM, Ph.D., reflects on liturgy as a vehicle for self-transformation. Liturgy puts us into an alternate world; it gives us a purer air to breathe; it supports our desire to live by our ideals and helps us to reset sights. Then, because it’s arguably even harder to change our institutions than it is to change ourselves, Celeste Mueller, Ph.D., another theologian, gets practical. She provides a strategy for examining practices in light of ideals. Do our most basic daily routines in our hospitals and long-term care facilities support or undermine our mission? What messages do we unwittingly convey?

In this issue we also provide inspiration by spotlighting five change makers who have honed in on something troubling about our world — either the world of health care, or society at large — and are focusing on solutions.

Finally, we learn from Stephen Post, Ph.D., (and the many researchers on whose work his article is based) about one of the places in which religion and science converge. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you, and experience a payback in terms of better health. Given that it’s often hard for us to hit our marks, it might help us to improve our aim if we keep this simple truth in mind: it’s good for us to be good.