

# CHA Joins Other Organizations In Electronic Bulletin Board System

**I**n today's threatening, rapidly changing environment, quick access to information can mean the difference between success and failure. To help its members share and obtain information critical to their futures, the Catholic Health Association (CHA) recently joined an electronic bulletin board system launched in 1993 by the Healthcare Forum and Kaiser & Associates.

HealthOnline is a convenient, comprehensive on-line computer networking community that promotes the sharing of information, resources, and strategies among associations, organizations, community groups, and individuals. Currently comprising 400 subscribers, HealthOnline brings together a diversity of healthcare experts and resources from across the country.

## WHO BELONGS TO HEALTHONLINE?

The principal partners in HealthOnline are the Healthcare Forum, a San Francisco-based education and research firm, and Kaiser & Associates, a consulting firm based in Brighton, CO, headed by Leland Kaiser.

CHA is the first major association to join HealthOnline as a sponsoring partner, which affords its members a customized private space, as well as the benefits of the broader on-line community. Dozens of other healthcare-related associations, including the American Hospital Association, are considering participation in the bulletin board.

Among HealthOnline's current subscribers are many Catholic healthcare organizations, including the Daughters of Charity National Healthcare System and participants in Healthcare Forum's Healthier Communities Initiative.

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"The collaborative aspect of HealthOnline is one of the key reasons CHA was interested in joining," notes Michael McCauley, the association's vice president for Communications Services. "CHA and its members will be able to improve their connections with each other and also reach beyond the Catholic community to work with others in codesigning this system to improve our nation's health."

### WHAT IS HEALTHONLINE?

As with other electronic bulletin boards, the basic requirements for participating in HealthOnline are a computer and a modem. But compared with more general networks like CompuServe and Internet, HealthOnline is easy to use, even for those less familiar with computers.

HealthOnline is structured like a community, with a colorful representation of different "buildings" that house different types of information (see Figure). For example:

- The "library" contains articles, case studies, *USA Today*, bibliographies of materials on specific topics, and other resources that users can either read on-line or download into their computers.
- The "emporium" is a marketplace for healthcare-related books, tapes, speakers, and consultants.
- The "post office" is a place to send and receive electronic mail.
- The "town hall" includes a calendar of events and a "lounge" for informal conversation.

Services from CHA, which are currently under development, will be located on a designated floor in the "professional building." On other floors of the building, CHA members can join other users in discussions on specific issues such as healthy communities, community health assessments, patient outcomes, hospital vision statements, transformational leadership, the hospital as a healing environment, and pastoral care.

On these floors and more general conversation areas, HealthOnline users can talk with other healthcare professionals across the country either



in real-time or by leaving messages that others can read and respond to at their convenience.

"This will be a great way for our members to share information on their integrated delivery activities," states Philip Karst, PhD, CHA's associate vice president of Member Services. "They can find out the latest on what's happening in other communities, and also request help from healthcare professionals who have already dealt with a particular barrier or issue."

### CHA's Plans

Since CHA has just signed on as a sponsoring partner in *HealthOnline*, McCauley notes that the association's specific services probably will not begin until after the beginning of the year. Possible applications include:

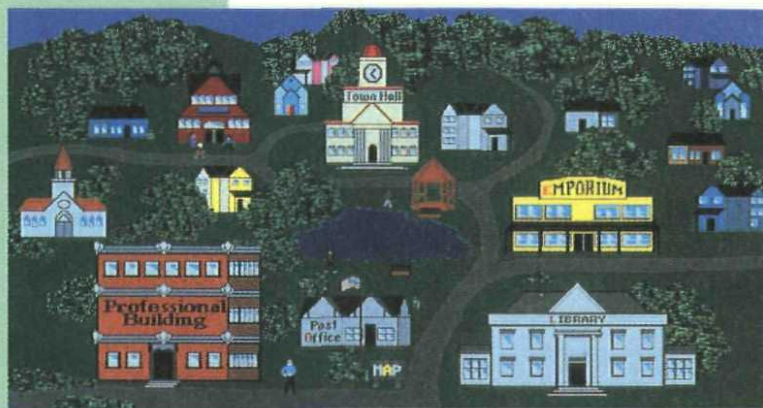
- Conversation areas in bioethics, integrated delivery, health and well-being, and other topics
- On-line access to indexes and articles from CHA publications such as *Health Progress* and *Catholic Health World*
- Educational programs or roundtable discussions conducted by healthcare leaders
- Networking directories to help members connect with other professionals experienced in dealing with specific problems
- Up-to-date information on healthcare policy developments and advocacy actions
- The capability to order CHA products or sign up for CHA conferences by computer

"The possibilities are endless," notes McCauley. "We need to make sure, though, that we put our resources into producing value-added materials that our members want and that they can't get elsewhere."

He adds that the association will be working with members to shape its participation in *HealthOnline*. In addition, CHA will be able to benefit from the experiences of other organizations involved with *HealthOnline*.

### AN EXPANDING RESOURCE

Although CHA's floor in *HealthOnline* will be the primary meeting place for association members, the benefits of the collaborative bulletin board are many. Other organizations are currently affiliated with the system or discussing joining it. As membership expands, the resources available will also. Future plans already include discussions and resources on patient-focused care, learning organizations, and clinical quality, as well as commercial data base searches



*HealthOnline*  
users with  
graphic interface  
capabilities will  
be greeted by this  
colorful menu.  
By using a mouse  
to click on  
different  
building icons,  
they can gain  
access to a wealth  
of information.

and access to Internet.

Membership in *HealthOnline* costs \$180 per year for an individual and \$750 per year for an organization, which entitles it to access for five persons. The organizational fee is increasing to \$1,000 per year in January 1995, but CHA members will be able to join for \$750 through August 1995.

CHA will be sending more information and enrollment forms to its member organizations throughout October and November. Although CHA's involvement is just beginning, McCauley urges members to consider the other benefits available to them immediately.

"Through *HealthOnline*, CHA members can link up with a whole host of global resources, tools, and experts," he says. "Not only will this benefit CHA members, their staffs, and the communities they serve, but it will also enable us to share the special gifts of the Catholic healthcare ministry with other healthcare professionals."

—Susan K. Hume

## WHO TO CALL

To learn more about CHA's plans for *HealthOnline* or to participate in its development, contact Michael McCauley at 314-427-2500, or send in the post-card inserted in this issue.

To find out how to join the electronic bulletin board, call *HealthOnline* at 303-659-2252.