



Community

Partnerships between Catholic Charities and Catholic Health Care Organizations

Like other health care organizations in the United States, Catholic health care facilities are developing new relationships with a wide array of partners to extend their ministry and to improve efficiency, coordination, and quality of care.

In forming these partnerships, Catholic-sponsored organizations may have an advantage over others. Through Catholic Charities and other social service programs, the Catholic Church in the United States is the largest provider of human services. In addition, the church's network of almost 20,000 parishes enables health care organizations to reach into communities where little infrastructure exists. The current movement toward integration of community-based health and social services creates opportunities for church-sponsored organizations to work together as never before.

Health Progress publishes an ongoing series of case studies of such partnerships, hoping they might serve as models for those creating integrated systems of care. These case studies of Catholic Charities agencies and Catholic health organizations were prepared by the Catholic Health Association as part of *New Covenant*, an initiative designed to promote collaborative efforts of the Catholic health ministry at the national and regional levels.

Here is another case study. *Health Progress* will present others in future issues.

If your health care organization is collaborating with a Catholic Charities agency in your area, we would like to know about it. Please contact Julie Trocchio by phone at 202-296-3993 or by e-mail at jtrocch@chausa.org.

Networks

Behavioral Health Care

Richmond, VA

Organizational Structure

Commonwealth Catholic Charities and Bon Secours St. Mary's Hospital, both based in Richmond, have an agreement stipulating that the hospital will provide emergency care for the agency's clients.

Goals of Affiliation

The partner organizations aim to make around-the-clock care available for low-income behavioral health clients in the Richmond area.

The Project

Commonwealth Catholic Charities has provided behavioral health care throughout southwestern Virginia since the 1960s. Until six years ago, the agency's behavioral health counselors carried pagers that enabled them to respond to suicide attempts and other emergency calls. Counselors who were also licensed psychiatric social workers had the authority to ask police officers to hospitalize clients who appeared to be a danger to others or to themselves.

This situation changed in 1994 because by then insurers had become reluctant to reimburse treatment prescribed by professionals who lacked a medical degree.

Commonwealth Catholic Charities responded to the change in several ways. In Richmond, where the agency's executive director also happened to sit on the board of Bon Secours St. Mary's Hospital, the local Catholic medical facility, the two organizations negotiated an agreement under which the hospital provides emergency care (typically after-hours and on holidays) for the agency's clients. The agency reciprocates by refer-

ring clients in need of acute care to the hospital. This agreement covers the agency's counseling centers in both Richmond and Hopewell, VA, a suburb.

In Charlottesville, VA, where Commonwealth Catholic Charities also has a counseling center, the agency originally negotiated a similar agreement with a private behavioral health firm. On one hand, the firm referred low-income clients to the agency; on the other hand, it provided emergency care to the agency's clients. Since the private firm went out of business, the agency has developed a like agreement with a local psychiatrist.

The agency's counseling centers in Roanoke, Radford, and Staunton, VA, have also negotiated similar agreements with local psychiatrists.

Governance Structure

Commonwealth Catholic Charities has written agreements with Bon Secours St. Mary's Hospital and its other partners.

Staffing

The agency usually employs four full-time and seven part-time counselors in its Richmond center. It has somewhat smaller staffs in its other five centers.

Contact:

Kent Radwan

Director of

Counseling

Commonwealth

Catholic Charities

Richmond, VA

804-285-5900



Practical Advice

Health care professionals seeking an arrangement like ours should begin by contacting either the administrator of the local Catholic hospital or the executive director of the local Catholic Charities. We've had no difficulty in negotiating such agreements because they're win-win for both partners. Our problem is that we have relatively few Catholic hospitals in our region. We only wish we had more with whom we might negotiate.

JOURNAL OF THE CATHOLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES

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Reprinted from *Health Progress*, January-February 2001
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