

## CREATING A ROAD MAP FOR THE ETHICAL DONATION OF GOODS

When I came to CHA in 2010, one of my first projects was to research the state of in-kind donations — or “medical surplus recovery” — from Catholic health care to organizations in low- and middle-income countries. The resulting research study conducted by Accenture Development Partnerships that year showed that while donations were happening, there was significant room for improvement to ensure our efforts had a positive impact in meeting the needs of people and communities.<sup>1</sup>



**BRUCE  
COMPTON**

Over the past 14 years, progress has been made; however, there are ample opportunities to ensure this work fully aligns with our core commitments reflected in our *Shared Statement of Identity for the Catholic Health Care Ministry* to promote and defend human dignity, attend to the whole person, care for those who are poor and vulnerable, promote

the common good, act on behalf of justice, steward resources and serve as a ministry of the Church.

In late 2023, CHA and its global health advisory council convened a group of ministry leaders and community partners to formally launch a community of practice dedicated to establishing a road map for the future of in-kind donations, ensuring quality standards across the Catholic health ministry. The group will work to identify innovative ways to improve processes for the delivery of high-quality, usable items that positively impact the people and communities we hope to assist. Elements of the road map will include global health and solidarity, responsible medical donations, environmental impact, outcome measurement, ethical standards and ways to identify the right Medical Surplus Recovery Organization with which to partner.

Damond Boatwright, CHA board chair and president and CEO of Hospital Sisters Health System, opened last year’s inaugural community of practice meeting by underscoring the dedication of Catholic health care to the well-being of

every human person and our call to care for creation. Boatwright emphasized the significance of CHA’s new vision statement, *We Will Empower Bold Change to Elevate Human Flourishing*, in guiding these efforts. He expressed, “What I really want to convey today is that everyone in health care has a role to play in responsible medical donations. It’s not just supply chain work or the work of our mission leaders. We need everyone to understand the basic principles and be committed to high-quality and ethical practices.” Additionally, Boatwright shared his personal commitment to ongoing learning in this area.

Chris Palombo, chief executive officer of Dispensary of Hope, a subsidiary of Ascension, and leadership council chair for the MedSurplus Alliance, was also in attendance at the gathering. Dispensary of Hope provides pharmacies and safety-net clinics with medications donated by pharmaceutical manufacturers that patients in need can receive for free.

During the event, Palombo shared insights that resonate with the *Leading With Integrity* theme of this issue of *Health Progress*, and he elaborates here on how honoring our commitment to integrity involves making measurable impact in improving the health of our global communities.

Palombo’s thoughts challenge us to lead with integrity as we empower bold change to elevate human flourishing. I invite your participation in the community of practice for in-kind donations, and CHA will share updates on this ongoing work, as we take to heart Pope Francis’ plea in *Laudato Si’* to hear both “the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor.”<sup>2</sup>

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# COURAGE TO RESPONSIBLY SERVE OUR MOST VULNERABLE

CHRIS PALOMBO, MA, MSHM

**A**s a leader in the Medical Surplus Recovery Organization space and an organization that delivers medications, our goal goes beyond shipping boxes and ensuring shipments reach their destination. As a nonprofit medication distributor, we give the clinics and pharmacies that we serve confidence in knowing that the medicines they order and receive from us meet or exceed quality measures and licensing requirements. Yet, the ultimate aim is to improve the health of those in need, specifically those living in poverty. It is through innovation and evaluation that we honor our mission and ensure our work to keep our patients first.

Fulfilling this commitment demands evaluating health outcomes, the truest measure of whether our efforts make a lasting difference. Are the donated medications actually improving the lives of the most vulnerable? This question forms the cornerstone of our work at Dispensary of Hope. Many patients have shared their stories of how access to affordable, needed medication has made a difference, even been life-saving.<sup>3</sup>

We're committed to setting the highest standards in medication distribution. Everyone, regardless of background, deserves access to quality medication delivered through a secure and reliable supply chain. This upholds not only the principle of equitable access but also the trust placed in us by generous medication donors.

We are impacting the lives of people who have found themselves without insurance.

A robust supply chain minimizes risks such as diversion, tampering and contamination, ensuring the medicine reaches patients safely and effectively. We operate at the same high standards as pharmaceutical manufacturers and licensed distributors, using best practices and leveraging partnerships with trusted third-party evaluators like Advisory Board Company and RTI International. Their research demonstrates not only improved health outcomes but also significant health care savings.<sup>4</sup> Access to free medication for people who are uninsured reduces the overall cost of health care delivery through improved health outcomes.<sup>5</sup>

For Medical Surplus Recovery Organization leaders distributing surplus products, insisting on measuring health outcomes is nonnegotiable. We serve the most vulnerable, a privilege that comes with immense ethical responsibility.

Losing sight of this can have devastating consequences for those relying on our services. True to our mission, we must relentlessly measure our impact and ensure every action contributes to a healthier future for those who need it most.

**CHRIS PALOMBO** is chief executive officer of Dispensary of Hope and leadership council chair for the MedSurplus Alliance. Dispensary of Hope is a U.S.-based nonprofit domestic medication distributor and a subsidiary of Ascension that helps to bridge the gap between pharmaceutical generosity and vital medication for the poor.

## NOTES

1. "CHA Medical Surplus Donation Study: How Effective Surplus Donation Can Relieve Human Suffering," Catholic Health Association, April 2011, <https://www.chausa.org/docs/default-source/general-files/b5c12ee8b2084119b16cd7bd86752e221-pdf>.
2. Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, The Holy See, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html).
3. "Stories of Hope," Dispensary of Hope, <https://www.dispensaryofhope.org/Stories-of-Hope>.
4. Benjamin T. Allaire et al., "Does Access to Free Medication Reduce Health System Costs? An Evaluation of the Dispensary of Hope Program," *Journal of Managed Care & Specialty Pharmacy* 29, no. 2 (February 2023): <https://doi.org/10.18553/jmcp.2023.29.2.187>; Jonathan Hughes and Abby Sparkman, "Charitable Medication Distribution Improves Care For Uninsured Patients with Diabetes," *American Journal of Managed Care* 29, no. 11 (November 2, 2023): <https://www.ajmc.com/view/charitable-medication-distribution-improves-care-for-uninsured-patients-with-diabetes>.
5. Hughes and Sparkman, "Charitable Medication Distribution Improves Care For Uninsured Patients with Diabetes."

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