

COMFORT AND CHALLENGE: HELP US MEET NEED FOR BOTH

This issue of *Health Progress* begins a new year, but I am writing this note in mid-December, with Christmas fast approaching. As I reflected on our special section topic in the context of the season, a passage from Isaiah 40, a chapter often associated with Christmas, came to mind. “Comfort, give comfort to my people, says your God.”



**PAMELA
SCHAEFFER**

For many of us, the season will indeed bring comfort — the joy of being with family and friends, good food, perhaps warm fires, the smells of pine and cedar.

Yet, as with the field of palliative care, the season's warmth is often intermingled with challenge. Relationships with friends and families can be a struggle. An abundance of good food means extra calories to work off. Fires need tending, pine and cedar dry out and drop their needles. And we Christians are well aware that the innocent child in the manger becomes the One who goads us to grow in our ability to love despite the inevitable pain.

The challenges of caring, in fact, are inherent in the mission of Catholic health care, precisely because they are the very essence of the Christian faith. These challenges were brought into sharp relief at a meeting I attended in early December, the annual conference of the Institute for Healthcare Improvement, an organization well known to many of you. There, committed health professionals mixed inspiring stories of success with presentations on the harsh realities associated with balancing the highest attainable quality with costs.

Here at *Health Progress*, we will be here for you throughout the year, providing both inspiration and challenge, as you celebrate your successes and struggle with the challenges of better serving the poor and vulnerable who come to you for healing. One of our most daunting challenges is choosing our special

section topics, then selecting and assigning the articles to include. Although these choices are clearly less ultimate than those Sr. Margaret Farley, RSM, invites us to ponder in her provocative article about the realities of aging and death (see Page 18), they are critical to carrying out the mission that Catholic health providers share.

In the interest of soliciting input and ideas from you, our readers, I am listing below the special section topics we are tentatively preparing to feature in coming issues. We would like to hear from you about related trends or challenges or programs, whether at your organization or another, that exemplify the direction in which quality health care is going or should go. Now and in the months ahead, please share your ideas for articles with us, whether they apply to these specific topics or not. Do so by sending me an e-mail — pschaeffer@chausa.com — with “ideas for HP” in the subject line.

March-April 2011: Trends in health care in the context of health reform

May-June 2011: Pediatric services, children's health

July-August 2011: Catholic health as employer

September-October, 2011: Urban health

November-December 2011: Stewarding the ministry

Jan-Feb 2012: Improving patient-centeredness

March-April 2012: Issues in research

Meanwhile, we wish you every blessing, both at work and at home, in the year ahead.

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