

THE NEXT STEP: FRAMING THE PROGRESS

For the next several months and even years, CHA and our members will be closely watching — and working to influence — the implementation of health reform. As reform moves from legislative language to practical rules and, eventually, patient care, does it continue to meet with the values and principles named in *Our Vision for U.S. Health Care*? Do the regulations that put reform into practice protect human dignity and make it easier for the most vulnerable to afford and access our health care system? How do we ensure that the American public understands reform, its implications and its benefits? What most urgently needs to be fixed, improved or strengthened?



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These questions and so many more will occupy the time and demand the talent of professionals in the health care industry and in our ministry. For Catholic hospitals and long-term care facilities, the answers to these questions speak to more than financial or regulatory policy. They speak to the more fundamental question of how the health care system is (or is not)

working to meet the needs of the nation and its residents.

Our advocacy team here at CHA will be busy collaborating with members and other organizations, as well as with Congress and the White House, to craft regulations that make sense for hospitals, nursing homes and, of course, patients. Always at the core of those efforts will be an attempt to answer the question of whether our expectations for a safe, affordable, high-quality system are being met.

As I have written in this column before, how we explain or frame the progress of reform will be of vital importance to its success. For the Catholic health ministry, framing should be easy. We have always approached reform as we have approached other issues: from a values-based perspective and through the prism of justice. We must continue to do that in the implementation phase. Our credibility arises from our view that health care is a basic human right and elemental to improving the health of our com-

munities. Messaging research definitively shows that support for reform is greatest when the message is centered on values instead of politics and partisanship.

There will be no shortage of challenges to the reform — from state-based arguments that the individual coverage mandate is unconstitutional to efforts to undermine or repeal the law by longtime opponents of change. The best thing we can do, as a ministry and as health care providers, is frame health reform as a critical component of public health, of the common good, of the long-term strength of our nation.

An important part of that effort will include telling the stories of people who have been positively affected by changes the law brought. For instance, beginning this year, parents can keep adult children on their health insurance plans until the children reach age 26, a change that will ensure

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coverage for many people who were previously priced out of the market. We can help promote the benefits of reform by highlighting the stories of young people who may have become much sicker than necessary because they didn't have insur-

ance, and who delayed or avoided treatment as a result. When the American people begin to see that reform is making real and positive differences in the lives of friends and neighbors, the tide will continue to turn in its favor.

The Health Reform Initiatives committee, in conjunction with other CHA committees and ministry professionals, will make available resources to help find and tell such stories. We will continue to develop fact sheets, PowerPoint presentations, Web videos, educational seminars and other materials that tell the story of reform's success and importance. As those pieces are planned and developed, we request and welcome input on the other messages and materials still needed to help our members implement and defend health reform.

Following the passage of health reform in March, I was privileged to work on a video commemorating the role of Catholic health care in advancing reform. (It is available on YouTube at www.youtube.com/catholichealthassoc.) This is not a story that goes back only several months or even years. As the video attempts to show, it is a story that stretches back decades and features the inspired dedication and perseverance of so many people.

As I interviewed Sr. Mary Caritas Geary, SP, who has been working on behalf of universal coverage for the bulk of her long and distinguished career, I could feel her sincerity and her resolve. Sr. Caritas and others featured in the reform video provide a vivid reminder of how much this work means to our ministry. If we can continue to bring their energy and commitment to social justice to the implementation and advancement of health reform, the nation will be better for it.

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A Shared Statement of Identity For the Catholic Health Ministry

We are the people of Catholic health care, a ministry of the church continuing Jesus' mission of love and healing today. As provider, employer, advocate, citizen—bringing together people of diverse faiths and backgrounds—our ministry is an enduring sign of health care rooted in our belief that every person is a treasure, every life a sacred gift, every human being a unity of body, mind, and spirit.

We work to bring alive the Gospel vision of justice and peace. We answer God's call to foster healing, act with compassion, and promote wellness for all persons and communities, with special attention to our neighbors who are poor, underserved, and most vulnerable. By our service, we strive to transform hurt into hope. 🕊

As the church's ministry of health care, we commit to:

- Promote and Defend Human Dignity
- Attend to the Whole Person
- Care for Poor and Vulnerable Persons
- Promote the Common Good
- Act on Behalf of Justice
- Steward Resources
- Act in Communion with the Church

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