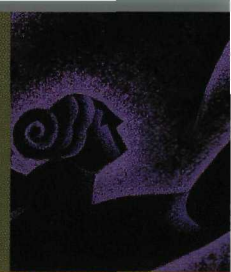


Ministry Can Lead Healthcare Transformation



Catholic Facilities Can Bring About Social Change as Providers, Insurers, Employers, and Advocates

Citing society's failure to deal with its most vulnerable, **Sr. Doris Gottemoeller, RSM**, chair of the Catholic Health Association's (CHA's) board of trustees, told members of the Catholic health ministry that they were



"Catholic providers have been called the conscience of healthcare in this country, presumably because we are effective in raising significant issues and demonstrating effective responses."

Sr. Doris Gottemoeller, RSM

"uniquely positioned" to lead a movement to shape a more compassionate and just healthcare system in the United States.

"Catholic providers have been called the conscience of healthcare in this country, presumably because we are effective in raising significant issues and demonstrating effective responses," Sr. Gottemoeller said. "I daresay we are the most significant counterweight to the commercialization of healthcare." She said Catholic healthcare leaders in four interrelated areas—service providers, insurers, employers, and advocates—can unite to create social change.

As service providers, she continued, CHA members include 532 hospitals and 319 long-term and continuum-of-care facilities, which daily live out their mission by providing high-quality care, reaching the poor and underserved, and offering spiritual care integrated with medical

services. To constitute a force for social change, the ministry must "use our combined strength to create a public perception, a corporate image, of what health-

care can and should be."

With 66 HMOs under Catholic auspices covering 3.4 million lives, managed care is one of the newest tools enabling Catholic healthcare to bring about social change, Sr. Gottemoeller said. While some managed care plans are only in it for the money, making the public skeptical of the system, Catholic healthcare "can insist on the values which managed care is designed to promote," including improved individual and community health through better use of preventive measures, better coordination of care, better use and allocation of resources, and enhanced influence on public policy.

CHA members can be instruments of social justice through their relationships with their more than 700,000 employees. From a justice perspective, Sr. Gottemoeller said, "our obligation to our employees might exceed that to our patients." Workers should enjoy the right to participate in decisions that affect their employment and should receive wages and benefits commensurate with their contribution to the ministry, she said.

Catholic healthcare's advocacy work includes its service to the vulnerable and underserved. By also speaking out in the public policy arena, Catholic healthcare can focus on the systemic causes of poor health, including poverty, substance abuse, inadequate education and housing, and poor distribution of resources. "Our present system is failing too many people to be any longer tolerated," Sr. Gottemoeller said. "And the fact that this is occurring at a time of unprecedented prosperity must be a cause of shame and embarrassment to this country."

Sr. Gottemoeller chided critics who argue that the Church should not be involved in healthcare because it has become "nothing but big business." Such people maintain it is impossible to be part of such a vast system without becoming tainted by greed and self-interest. But Catholic healthcare's legacy, values, and vision "all give us a credibility in the public arena," she said.