THE CHANGING FACE OF LONG-TERM CARE

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At certain times in the history of our health care ministry, we have been called to meet profound needs in our communities. At this moment, and as we move forward, we are called to respond to the needs of an aging population.

This call has a demographic imperative hurtling toward us like a locomotive. Over the next three decades, the number of people older than 85 years is expected to triple.

This call also has a mission imperative. We respect life at every stage of development; we are called to support the dignity of individuals in their last years of life, when their dignity is most fragile. We believe that health means wholeness and that this holistic view of the spiritual, physical, and emotional being—with health, shelter, and social needs—is most important in the later years of life.

We are the right people to meet this challenge. Catholic health care has a ministry rich in a tradition of compassion, innovation, collaboration, and excellence. We will need all these gifts as we respond to this population’s needs.

This issue of Health Progress is intended to help our governance, executive, and staff leaders come to grips with critical issues related to caring for an aging nation. From staffing to financing, redesigning a care system for a predominantly chronically ill population, to advocating public policy, this issue offers concrete suggestions for dealing with many of the challenges facing us as we answer the call to care for God’s oldest children.