

September 27, 2012

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

The American Hospital Association (AHA), where I have served as a member of the Regional Policy Board for the past two years, is one health organization that is results-oriented. The AHA knows that the current growth rate for healthcare spending is unsustainable and must be slowed. That has been the driver behind *Creating a Healthier Tomorrow*, the AHA's action plan and priority checklist to which my southeastern colleagues and I contributed. Here, boiled down, is the essence of the suggestions AHA makes in improving U.S. health and controlling healthcare costs:

- ***Accelerated payment and delivery system reforms***, which align incentives among physicians, nurses, and other care givers with those of the government, insurers, employers, and—most importantly—patients. Providers will coordinate care, add value (quality divided by cost) and partner with payers. Government and other insurers will be innovative, fair, and cooperative in exploring new methods of care, without adding unnecessary regulations. Removing barriers to cooperation, while encouraging preventive measures and engaging populations in healthy behavior, helps everyone.
- ***Eliminating complications and infections*** has been a longstanding goal of AHA and the respected Institute of Medicine. Providers, the government, insurers, employers and the public would all benefit from a well-defined set of standards that would encourage metric performance measures. Today, there are too many confusing measures of “quality.” What is needed, by contrast, is clarity.
- ***Requiring use of electronic medical records*** has recently been boosted by governmental rewards. NCH is proud to have received the *Most Wired* award this year and to rank among the top 215 hospitals in the nation for successful implementation and use of information technology. Soon we will introduce a community health information exchange (HIE).
- ***Transparency*** for quality and price information is another challenge that must be addressed in this digital age. What's needed is an agency along the lines of a Securities and Exchange Commission to standardize quality reporting. Sharing understandable cost information with insurers and patients is needed.
- ***Engaging patients and families*** in prevention and care is also obligatory. An estimated 70% of illnesses could be avoided if we were to better care for ourselves. (Just think about smoking and obesity.)
- ***Eliminating inefficient care*** could save 30% of healthcare costs. Overuse, underuse, and misuse are equally costly and harmful. The antidote: Collaboration, sharing electronic medical records, and evidence-based medicine.
- ***Modernizing Medicare and Medicaid*** so that these 50-year-old systems are responsive to today's needs and resources. Involving patients and simplifying process are keys to the solution.
- ***Reforming the medical liability system*** would decrease “defensive medicine,” potentially saving \$17 – \$62 billion over the next decade.

Real improvements in health and healthcare are possible. Organizations like AHA and systems like NCH are leading the way to a better, more competitive domestic health system.

Respectfully,



Allen S. Weiss, M.D., President and CEO

P.S. Feel free to share *Straight Talk* and ask anyone to email me at allen.weiss@nchmd.org to be added.