

September 17, 2009

Dear Friends and Colleagues:

Healthcare reform remains a big topic, both locally and nationally. Last Wednesday, I participated in the first Twitter Town Hall, sponsored by the *Naples Daily News* and Florida Representative Matt Hudson, at the *Daily News*' impressive new headquarters. The proceedings were moderated by Chamber of Commerce President/CEO Michael Reagen. I was joined on the panel by Collier County Medical Society President Dr. Joe Gauta, and Collier County Democratic Executive Committee Chairman Steven Hemping. It was a full house of passionate people, with hundreds of others watching online.

Less than 30 minutes after our Town Hall ended, President Obama addressed Congress and the nation about healthcare reform. His remarks focused first, on controlling escalating healthcare costs (which have increased 66% since 2000, while median household income has dropped sharply); and second, on obtaining insurance for those who lack it (currently estimated between 46 and 50 million, including 600,000 newly unemployed).

My "contribution" Wednesday revolved around my belief that there is currently more than enough money in the healthcare system to provide high quality care for everyone, without adding taxes or causing financial ruin either to physicians and hospitals, pharmaceutical firms, device manufacturers or insurance companies. Nor do we need to change the traditional patient-physician relationship.

I see two non-partisan initiatives that would increase the value of care by improving quality and decreasing cost: First, changing delivery of care to be less expensive and more effective; and second, stressing prevention.

- **Changing care delivery.** We need to mandate *evidence-based medicine*, which comprises guidelines for best practices, established by practitioners from medical outcomes research studies. This would allow more predictable results for patients, because the current 40% variation in treatment for the same diagnosis would be reduced to near zero. For example, only 59% of Medicare patients with cancer receive "best practices," according to the National Quality Forum (www.qualityforum.org/), while only 55% of all U. S. patients receive recommended care according to RAND Corp (www.rand.org/research_areas/health/).

Evidence-based medicine would also impact costs associated with costly malpractice. According to a study in the *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, the malpractice system includes approximately 1% of direct costs (awards, legal fees, administration, etc.) and 9% for the indirect costs of so-called "defensive medicine." Evidence-based medicine would also make fraud, which accounts for another 10% of costs, easier to recognize, as outliers would become obvious. So these two areas alone could account for some 20% in cost savings.

- **Prevention.** Studies suggest that fewer than 5% of Americans don't smoke, stay close to ideal body weight, exercise three times per week for at least 20 minutes, and eat fruits and vegetables. Seventy percent of American illness is self-induced; 30% is genetic in origin. We spend 90% of resources on illness and not health promotion. Seventy-five cents of each healthcare dollar goes towards patients with chronic diabetes, heart disease, cancer, asthma, etc.—all of which can be prevented entirely, detected earlier, or better managed. Medicare and Medicaid numbers are even worse. Clearly, we need to change our priorities as an employer and as a nation. That's what we've done at NCH with our new Employee Health and Wellness partnership and by fulfilling our mission to promote, maintain, and restore health in those we serve. We all will be better off embracing evidence-based medicine and prevention.

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.