

## **Duchak-Meyers: Meaningful hospital collaboration should be local**

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BY DOUGLAS DUCHAK AND AUDREY MEYERS

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FOR THOSE of us in hospital administration in Bergen County, it is hard to understand the current rationale that Hackensack University Medical Center is using to justify its stance on a new, for-profit hospital on the current Pascack Valley Hospital site.

In the past three-plus years since the inevitable and subsequent bankruptcy and closure of Pascack Valley Hospital, HUMC leaders have repeatedly said that health care competition is good and that they would rather compete than collaborate.

In fact, in late 2006, when it was apparent that the Westwood hospital could not survive as an inpatient hospital, area hospital CEOs began discussions about collaborating on how to best serve the people in northeast Bergen County. HUMC leaders stated that they were not interested in taking on any initiative at the struggling hospital.

Further, they said that they had no interest in collaborating with local hospitals at this site, a position they have many times reinforced.

Now, in an Op-Ed article in the Record (“Ultimately, all health care is local,” Dec. 1) HUMC President Robert Garrett states that, “If hospitals were encouraged to enter into partnerships and collaborations, the highest quality of health care would be available...”

This recent stance raises the question: Why is collaborating with Legacy Hospital Partners, a Texas-based for-profit organization, better than collaborating with area non-profit hospitals to establish new and needed outpatient medical services that make the most sense for the community?

The answer is simple: Collaboration requires compromise and shared revenues. As non-profit hospitals, Englewood Hospital and Medical Center and The Valley Hospital are willing to collaborate because shared revenue will be automatically returned to the community.

### **Profits for investors**

HUMC, however, must return revenues to shareholders. HUMC’s new, for-profit hospital must maximize profits for investors, not the community.

In addition, appropriate collaboration requires developing a plan for programs and services that best serve the broader community, ones that serve unmet needs and create new jobs, not duplicate services that will damage existing hospitals and shift jobs from one hospital to another.

While we have repeatedly suggested the concept of area hospitals coming together to develop new and needed outpatient medical services at the site of the bankrupt hospital, so far HUMC has been unwilling. Where’s the collaboration in that?

HUMC has made a huge real estate investment at Pascack Valley Hospital and now the only way to recover this investment is by partnering with this out-of-state group and opening an unnecessary hospital. While most health care professionals and the governor's Reinhardt commission know that reopening an acute-care hospital is wrong, HUMC is pushing hard simply to protect its investment.

Valley and Englewood have consistently put policy over politics.

In the report by the Commission on Rationalizing Health Care Resources, the state recognized it had a serious problem with over-bedding throughout New Jersey and particularly in our area. We support the findings of that comprehensive report and have sought to improve health care in Bergen County by suggesting the creation of non-acute-care medical services, not creating more problems by applying for a new hospital.

Furthermore, HUMC claims that its partnership with Legacy will not cost New Jersey a penny.

While it is true that the state wouldn't bail out the hospital if it fails, HUMC ignores the dollars it will cost New Jersey when it takes patients from area non-profit hospitals and causes disruption to the Bergen County health care system.

The new for-profit hospital will financially impair existing hospitals, lead to the closure of necessary programs and cause hospital layoffs. It is only a matter of time until the new hospital costs money for both the state and the people of Bergen County.

The statement that "it doesn't cost the state a penny" is not and should not be a criterion for evaluating any application for a new hospital.

### **Working together**

Back in 2006, we suggested local collaboration and we have repeatedly offered to work with area hospitals to ensure excellent services are available to all the people of Bergen County.

We believe, however, that collaboration should be with local non-profit hospitals, not with investors from outside New Jersey and the country.

We also believe collaboration should be undertaken to maintain the strength of the county's health care system, not allow for one new for-profit hospital to damage the other hospitals that are so ably serving the residents of local communities.

Let's keep the planning and collaboration local; let's keep it in New Jersey.

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