

March 6, 2014

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

The new watchwords in healthcare—in our nation, around the world, and especially here in Southwest Florida—are *population health*.

Literally translated, *population health* is all about how to help a whole community or ecosystem live longer, happier, and healthier lives.

Last week, a formation group of about 30 Naples healthcare and community leaders met with Tony Buettner, a senior executive of *Blue Zones*, an organization dedicated to helping people improve their lifestyle and live longer. We discussed how we might begin this arduous but worthwhile journey, talked about the need for collaboration and commitment, and the long-term monetary resources required.

To start, we must be committed to changing our mentality from one of hoping for good health and when this doesn't happen, reverting to the "repair shop" behavior. Instead, we must invest the resources of time, energy, money, and commitment to improve our odds to live longer, happier and healthier lives.

For most of us, implementing lifestyle and healthcare changes can raise the odds of health and longevity for entire communities. The indisputable fact is that such conditions as lack of access to healthy foods, poor quality and unhealthy housing environments, and an absence of safe and/or affordable options for physical activity have far greater influence on health than medical care or genetics.

Frankly, our nation's healthcare system has no choice but to move toward *population health*. Our traditional fee-for-service healthcare payment system, with its perverse incentives for ever-higher-cost acute care has reached a point where today it threatens the economic stability of our nation. Successful health care systems in the coming decades must migrate from providing high-cost, acute individual health care to providing more efficient, preventive health for whole communities.

We at NCH, as a leading steward of our region's healthcare, have a special responsibility to focus on population health and disease prevention. This is beneficial not only to community health but also a great boon to our local economy with its history of excessive growth followed by cyclical despair. Becoming an even more attractive environment for health and longevity will help overcome historical economic bumps in the road.

Clearly, NCH can't do this alone. We need to partner with other Collier County organizations, both large and small. This is why we are working so closely with large employers like the Collier County government and school system as well the Chamber of Commerce, which represents many small employers. Groups of individuals, retirees, school children, religious congregations, and all sorts of other affinity groups also need to be engaged. We have to put "peer pressure" on each other to first recognize our current state of health; develop plans to change; have the courage, fortitude, and diligence to make these hard changes; celebrate successes; and then continue this virtuous cycle. Meanwhile, government leaders will need to embrace change in new policies, procedures, and laws to encourage a healthy-built environment.

Admittedly, changing the way we live is an audacious goal, but it is so worth the effort for the ultimate well-being of our community and all of us who live and work here.

Respectfully,

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

P.S. DO YOU HAVE A COLLEAGUE OR FRIEND WHO WOULD BE INTERESTED IN THESE UPDATES?

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