

# Straight Talk

A weekly update from management on the issues that matter most



March 13, 2008

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

It's no secret to any of us who live in Collier County that our state and our community are currently undergoing a rough patch in terms of economic downturn.

The numbers aren't pleasant. Florida is predicting over two billion dollars less in taxes collected this year. Collier County has seen a decrease of 900 students in public school enrollment over the past two years alone. In my 30 years in town, I can't remember two consecutive years of such gloomy economic conditions.

But I'm a committed optimist, and I have faith that "*this, too, will pass.*" And I have particular confidence in all of our committed and hardworking colleagues who make up the NCH team. But our institution is not immune to the economic crosscurrents that have buffeted our region.

Admissions since the beginning of our October 1 fiscal year are relatively flat, with some notable variations. Both our birth and ER volumes are down 12%. The decreased birth rate, I believe, reflects the decreased numbers of working families in the area as well as fewer migrants. ER visits are down, probably because there are many more outpatient choices for patients. Interestingly, admissions from the ER are up 6%. About 60% of inpatients come through the ER, but none of them planned to be in the hospital when they started their day. Cardiac cath volumes are up 4% which is good.

One growing concern is the number of uninsured and under-insured patients we are caring for everyday. Additionally, the acuity (the measure of how sick our patients are) also has increased. The fact our patients are sicker, coupled with other factors, has resulted in a longer length of stay in the hospital. This complicates the task for all of us, particularly nurses and others involved with hands-on care.

Our challenge in this more difficult environment comes down to two words, "*working smarter.*"

For one thing, this means we must focus on satisfying our patients, so that they "spread the word" about NCH. A satisfied patient will tell up to five people about a positive experience, whereas an unhappy patient will tell 20 or more people. Right now, 85% of our patients think we are either "good" or "very good." We need to shift that mix so that 85% think we are "very good." This is important because half of our over-65-year-old patients—more than 10,000 people a year—have a 50% chance of returning to the hospital at least once during the year after they are first admitted. While we hope no patient has to come back, we want NCH to be the hospital of choice for the community.

*Working smarter* also means managing our supplies and other resources more rigorously and working together to deliver a better outcome for patients, the community and ourselves.

In the final analysis, in good times and bad, we are all in this together.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Allen".

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