

January 7, 2010

Dear Friends and Colleagues:

At the dawn of a new decade, it is a time for gratitude for what we have, confidence in what we provide our community, and optimism for what we can achieve in the future. In that spirit, allow me to turn *prognosticator* and share some thoughts about the NCH decade ahead as an integrated healthcare system.

As healthcare providers in the 2010s, we face real operational and economic challenges in terms of such things as less efficient processes and declining reimbursements for our services; and significant opportunities in terms of continued quality improvement, growth and financial stability. At NCH, we are fortunate to enjoy an employee base that is compassionate, competent, motivated, educated, embraces change, and employs process management—all of which lead to happiness, contentment and success.

So with that as backdrop, here are the four areas I predict will be most important in this new decade.

- **Physician integration.** Clearly, our community will be better served as we develop, with our physician colleagues, nationally-competitive quality care by aligning everyone's goals—patients, physicians, payers, and our integrated hospital system. Demonstrated *quality* is and will be the focus. Integration is a focus on the national stage as well. One pilot healthcare insurance reform calls for “bundled payments,” where one single payment is shared among everyone involved in an episode of care—including the patient, who may be “rewarded” for his or her own efficient care. The point is our current healthcare system simply can't sustain its global competitiveness on its current course. That's why I'm confident the decade will bring systemic change to the delivery of healthcare.
- **Technology.** NCH will continue to lead the way in our community in terms of such advances as robotic surgery and *digital healthcare*, using information technology to integrate inpatient and outpatient medical records. Ours will become a “smart” paperless environment. By “smart,” I mean harnessing the power of modern computer technology for *decision support* (reminding patients and physicians when and what they should be doing), *safety* (as in medication administration), and *access* (with patients controlling their own records).
- **Prevention.** We are already well on the road to *wellness* with two busy Wellness Centers and employee health insurance goals of early detection, education and lifestyle changes. We share this effort with other community leaders, which makes me optimistic that most responsible employers and employees will embrace similar endeavors. NCH is happy to be a model and share its best practices.
- **Personal healthcare and genomics.** Another coming healthcare phenomenon is specific diagnostics and therapeutics, custom-designed for each of us. Having your genes sequenced—for one reason, to help predict the chance of illness—is not far off. Today, you can obtain a partial sequencing for about \$500 (<https://www.23andme.com/>). NCH plans to be a leader in genomic medicine as we partner with existing and accomplished scientific luminaries in the field.

Even with the importance of these four overriding trends, we should always remember what I was reminded on New Year's Day by two experienced RNs, **Jean Werner** and **Elaine Phillips**, that the real reason we all went into healthcare in the first place was and remains—to *care for people*. Happy New Year!

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.