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Shared Advocacy for the Common Good

Marianne Potina, Vice-President, Mission Integration
Mercy Health Partners, Lourdes Hospital , Paducah

My name is Marianne Potina and I am Vice President, Mission Integration at Mercy Health Partners - Lourdes Hospital in western Kentucky; a region of Catholic Healthcare Partners based in Cincinnati, Ohio. I have served in Catholic healthcare ministry for over 15 years.

There is much to take into consideration when we look at Catholic healthcare. The social, economic and political environments play as much a part in the health-care arena as the buildings, staff and supplies. Catholic health care does not stand-alone. It is dependant on government funding and Federal and State regulation. When we examine our roots, we are reminded that Catholic health care organizations evolved from families and neighbors caring for the sick and the frail in their homes, to the establishment of hospitals run by religious communities. In 1991, John E. Curley, Jr. the then president of the Catholic Health Association of the United States said, "Catholic healthcare ministry is Sacramental ministry. This ministry is more than business, more than efficiency, more than 'bottom-line' calculations. It is participation in and continuation of a sacred, holy, and healing presence among all people."

Catholic health care requires a balanced approach to health care that includes the mission and ministry. It means providing services to all who come without restrictions based on race, creed, gender, ability to pay, etc.

Catholic Healthcare Partners (CHP), a 34 -hospital system, is advocating to:

- Secure coverage and access for all;
- Drive quality; and
- Ensure fair payment.

We meet with our state and federal elected officials every year to review these issues.

We extend the healing ministry of Jesus by improving the health of our communities with emphasis on people who are poor and underserved; that is our mission.

Not only do we welcome the under-served through generous charity care programs, but we advocate on

their behalf for access to quality care for all. In the Mercy Health Partners - KY Region in 2007 our charity care added up to 7% of our operating expense. This charity care included, Medicaid unpaid costs, Government Indigent Program unpaid costs, subsidized health services, financial contributions, community building activities, and education.

Clinical quality and patient safety are always at the top of our minds. As part of CHP, we collaborate on system-wide patient safety and quality initiatives and share best practice - learning what works and what doesn't. We are one of the first organizations in the nation to have a strategic plan with a focus on clinical quality. We are an early adopter of innovative, evidence-based practices that improve quality care. We hold ourselves accountable for results by tracking progress using a formal scorecard and tying executive pay to performance in quality.

We provide high quality care and high quality caring. We invest in talent, to make sure that all of our associates have the tools and training they need to constantly improve. We invest in the most effective technologies, decreasing opportunity for error and making reporting our mistakes easier so that systems can be changed to consistently improve results. We are one of the first health systems to focus on professional behavior, helping to set the bar rather than reacting when the regulatory commission puts a standard in place.

While providing the latest technological and medical innovations, Catholic healthcare recognizes that our health care delivery is different because of our mission to extend the healing ministry of Jesus. Jesus' healing mission went further than caring only for physical affliction. We read in the Gospel of John, of how Jesus touched people at the deepest level of their existence; he sought their physical, mental, and spiritual healing (Jn 6:35; 11:25-27). He 'came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly' (Jn 10:10)."

The Catholic Conference of Kentucky (CCK) is an agency of the Catholic Bishops of Kentucky, established in 1968. It speaks for the Church in matters of public policy, serves as liaison to government and the legislature, and coordinates communications and activities between the church and secular agencies. There are 406,000 Catholics in the Commonwealth. The Bishops of the four dioceses of KY constitute CCK's Board of Directors.

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There is a tension between the place we hold in the health care arena and who we think we are as we hold that place. Our focus on the mission helps staff understand why they do what they do and that is what makes the difference. When our front line staff believes that there is purpose in this worthwhile work, they will make a difference. When the senior leadership of the organization considers a socially just wage that is consistent with Catholic Social Teaching and approves a living wage (not the minimum wage) for staff that is what makes us different. Advocating for the plight of the uninsured by providing charity care and taking the next step and lobbying our government officials for change, makes us different. Reaching out to the community with wellness programs makes us different. Our direct caregivers are charged with the responsibility to support patient rights when matters of ethics are in question and that makes us different.

The thrust of Catholic health care's mission is to improve the health of our community with special emphasis for the poor and underserved. Not just those who have the where-with-all to afford health care today, but especially those without means. The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, addresses the people of God in our neighbors and respect for the human person by saying that:

Today, there is an inescapable duty to make ourselves the neighbor of every individual, without exception, and to take positive steps to help a neighbor whom we encounter, whether that neighbor be an elderly person abandoned by everyone, a foreign worker who suffers the injustice of being despised, a refugee, or a starving human being who awakens our conscience by calling to mind the words of Christ: "As you did it to one of the least of these my brothers or sisters, you did it to me" (Mt 25:40).

As a ministry of the Catholic Church, Catholic health care, with roots traced back to the historical Jesus, demonstrate the extension of Jesus' healing ministry in our daily practices. As a faith-based organization, we are guided by our mission and core values. We support our associates in providing the most compassionate care possible. When we recognize the why of what we

do in the context of providing care we understand it is a ministry and not just a job. Doing as Jesus did by going beyond the law (not to break the law) and healing on the Sabbath gets past the task in order to recognize the dignity of the individual. That is the ministry of the church and of Catholic health care. When we in health care recognize the dignity of the individual by doing what Jesus did then Catholic health care is a ministry of the church. We do this by building relationships as opposed to checking off the tasks from a to-do list. That is when patients will know that they are being cared for. The healing is not simply in the administration of a test or a medication but in the relationships we build.

I am privileged every day to witness these relationships. When a new born child needed to be life flighted to a major metropolitan hospital and the baby's mother had no family support and no means to get to her child, the OB staff took up a collection to hire a car and driver to take her there. That is the value of compassion lived out. When strangers to our community found themselves in our emergency room with not only their wounds tended to but also given food clothing shelter and transportation to their home out of state they experienced our commitment to respect the dignity of every person we serve. I witnessed an 81-year-old woman who was suffering the ravages of cancer being bathed like a newborn child and I recognized Jesus in her caregiver.

The late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, who in his writings about Catholic health care and said, Our distinctive vocation (in Catholic healthcare) is not so much to heal better or more efficiently than anyone else; it is to bring comfort to people by giving them an experience that will strengthen their confidence in life. The ultimate goal of our care is to give those who are ill, through our care, a reason to hope.

We all face the dilemma of limited resources and insatiable demand. At Lourdes Hospital we are confident that as we work to secure coverage and access for all, providing excellent quality and working to ensure fair payment our communities will know Jesus' healing ministry.