



Champaign County Health Care Consumers

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Grassroots organizing for health care justice and access since 1977.

July 8, 2004

TO: Mr. James Unland,
President, The Health Capital Group
Executive Editor, HealthBusinessAndPolicy.com

Re: Update On Recent Activities

Dear Mr. Unland:

Of all the people outside Champaign County who have followed events here, you have probably taken more time to listen to and speak with the various parties in respect to the Provena Covenant Medical Center situation, and for this reason I wanted to give you a special update of recent developments from our point of view, including some breakthroughs in recent weeks:

- Champaign County Health Care Consumers (CCHCC) and Provena Covenant have worked together to expand and improve Provena Covenant's charity care, discounted care, and billing/collections practices by forming a joint Medical Debt Committee of community members and hospital executives that meets on a monthly basis. I am proud to say that two of this Committee's members are patients who had experienced harmful and aggressive collections practices by Provena Covenant under its former administration. Now, these two people sit on this joint committee and literally help to develop and rewrite policies and procedures; Provena Covenant has graciously welcomed them and has benefited from their participation as I'm sure that Mark Weiner, the CEO, has told you.
- In addition to improving Provena Covenant's policies and procedures, this collaboration has also resulted in system-wide changes at Provena Health. Under the leadership of Provena Covenant's CFO, Cheryl Harmon, our Committee's work has been presented to the Provena Health system, and Provena Health has chosen to adopt these policies and procedures at a system-wide level, thus transmitting the positive impact of our Medical Debt Committee into communities where the other Provena hospitals are located.
- You need to know that the policies and procedures that Provena Covenant (and Provena Health system) have implemented as a result of our mutual work go far beyond the stipulations of recent Illinois legislative proposals (SB2579, etc.), evidencing that Provena Covenant has clearly paid attention to the needs of our community above and beyond what might be considered the 'minimum necessary' actions. This is, itself, testimony to the advantage of local community group-hospital collaboration and innovation.
- In regards to innovation, I am now pleased to be able to report to you today that CCHCC and Provena Covenant have applied for a special grant with respect to a new concept to expand assistance to the low income population that will be known as the Passport To Care® about which we will be making further announcements in the near future.

As always, CCHCC's focus is to give consumers a voice in the health care system. I feel that our collaboration with Provena Covenant is 'for real' and is notable because there is true consumer participation and community involvement in these efforts. I believe that this will result in innovative, long-lasting programs that will improve the health of Champaign County residents, reduce costs for Provena Covenant by better and more holistically serving the needs of patients in a timely way, and build community support for these programs and for Provena Covenant Medical Center.

My board joins me in thanking you again for taking the trouble to include me as a guest on your recent May 20th national HFMA teleconference to present to hospital CFOs and in-house attorneys the perspective of a community group in respect to these matters. I look forward to addressing the fall 2004 conference that you are planning in Chicago for hospital board members and CEOs at which I understand you intend to feature some hospital executives, possibly even executives of Provena who could give an in-person account from their vantage point of the marked turnaround in the relationship between our two organizations inclusive of the innovations described above. Honestly, Jim, more of this kind of dialogue and exchange needs to take place with community groups and hospitals 'in the same room' so to speak, in that I believe (and we in Champaign-Urbana have now shown) that *on-the-ground local dialogues can result in real progress*—intense though these dialogues can be at times. If the choice were up to me between local solutions and sweeping legislative solutions, I would almost always favor local solutions given their flexibility and potential to innovate—leaving aside, of course, the need for large-scale national health payment reform.

It is my fondest hope that more hospitals and community groups throughout the United States will, at the local level, move to address issues surrounding medical pricing, billing and collections by forging the kind of working relationship that we have been able to develop with Provena Covenant, moving from a very difficult situation into a turnaround here in Champaign-Urbana—a turnaround that by any measure has been dramatic. Community hospitals will find that most, if not all, community groups can be their friends as well as co-advocates in advocating the kinds of broader systemic changes in health payment that our state and our nation desperately need.

Thank you again for focusing so much of your attention these issues and for coming to Champaign County to meet all of the parties on several occasions. I will continue to update you periodically and, as always, should you have any questions or wish to further discuss these developments, please feel free to contact me at (217) 352-6533, ext. 11 or by e-mail at claudia@shout.net.

Sincerely,

Claudia Lennhoff
Executive Director, Champaign County Health Care Consumers

P.S. Even though this is addressed to you, Jim, please feel free to distribute it as you see fit.