

THE VITAL ROLE OF COMMUNITY SERVICE

by Richard T. Nalle, Jr.
 Chairman, Board of Managers,
 Pennsylvania Hospital

IN colonial America, medical care was the privilege of the wealthy who could afford to have a physician come to their homes. The poor had no care. In 1751, a group of public-spirited citizens led by Dr. Thomas Bond and Benjamin Franklin founded Pennsylvania Hospital. Since that time, Pennsylvania Hospital, followed by other voluntary hospitals, has had a rich tradition of community service.

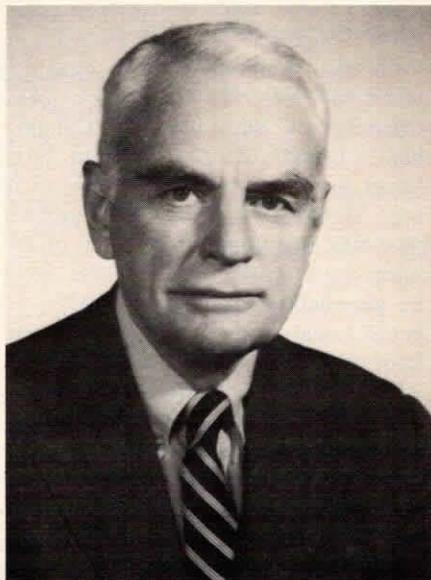
That commitment by hospitals to serve people, regardless of their ability to pay, has made it possible for many Philadelphians who cannot afford the health care they need to receive outstanding care in a variety of mental and physical health programs.

Voluntary hospitals make the commitment to community service at some cost in both staff resources and financial subsidies. They also absorb the cost of care for many patients who do not have health insurance.

Whenever possible, hospitals help these patients gain access to the entitlements of public medical assistance programs. While Medicaid covers substantially all inpatient services, it covers only two-thirds of the cost of the hospital's outpatient services. The hospital absorbs these and other non-reimbursable expenses for patients on Medical Assistance.

While providing medical care to the indigent is no longer the sole purpose of hospital operation, it remains an integral part of the system. As the numbers of medically indigent continue to rise, so do the dollars spent in caring for them. From 1980 to 1985, for example, the amount of non-subsidized care provided by hospitals in the United States increased from \$2.8 billion to \$6.3 billion.

At the same time, direct payment by the patient for hospitalization is practically non-existent. About 77 percent of Americans are covered by a wide range of private insurance plans, each with a different payment method. Medicare and



Medicaid cover another 18 percent of the population.

Balancing the traditional role of community service with available resources in the increasingly complex financial world of healthcare is our challenge.

Prior to the 1970s, the healthcare system was remarkably stable due to the absence of major outside influences on the medical profession and community hospitals. During the late 1960's, several factors began to emerge which would begin to change the status quo. These included the increase in number of physicians in training and the development of broader health care insurance. With the addition of Medicare and Medicaid, a number of forces combined and subjected the health care system to tremendous change.

During the 1970s, with the emergence of the for-profit hospital chains and the surplus of both physicians and beds, the power structure surrounding the community hospital began to change. With the addition of increasingly competitive forces in the 1980s, communities began to lose control of their hospitals. Many voluntary hospitals have converted to in-

vestor-owned operations, or behave as if they were. The net result of these various forces is, in some areas, greatly restricted access to health care for the medically indigent.

It is important for hospitals to stress their voluntary role to increase community backing, provide for greater philanthropic support, preserve their tax exempt position and help maintain a sense of mission among the employees and staff of the hospitals.

There are a number of programs that hospitals offer that go beyond traditional patient care. We are not obliged to provide these services, but we have chosen to do so. Some people in the community will be able to pay for those services and others not. At Pennsylvania Hospital, we believe these programs fit well with the other services we offer. They extend our clinical and management skills into the community and provide an array of services that go beyond what is necessary.

For the elderly in need, our new programs have ranged from hospital home health care to the hospice program for the terminally ill, to the skilled nursing facility that we will open next summer, to the city's first hospital-based adult day health care program, where we can treat the sick elderly to minimize the need for hospital care while still providing respite to their families.

Almost 20 years ago, Pennsylvania Hospital was among the first hospital in the city to develop a community mental health/mental retardation center and we remain one of the few hospitals that still supports these programs, helping groups such as the homeless, mentally retarded and Southeast Asian community.

Scholarships at the Mill Creek School provide adolescents who have severe adjustment problems and inadequate financial resources the means to complete high school while they receive intensive psychotherapy at The Institute of Pennsylvania Hospital.

To address the complex problems of

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infant mortality and teen pregnancy, we offer the largest maternal and infant care program in the city. Doctors and nurses offer family planning, obstetrical and gynecological services, nutritional programs; and pediatric care for women and children, 85 percent of whom receive Medical Assistance.

Pennsylvania Hospital has offered leadership to other emerging programs, such as the Greater Philadelphia Health Action Group, which provides outpatient medical services to the poor, and the HealthPASS program, the health maintenance organization established by the Commonwealth's medical assistance program.

Voluntary hospitals are in a unique position. They have evolved as a special kind of institution in our society, operating somewhere between a business and a public service, held in trust for the community by private citizens acting for the public good in the governance of these institutions. Like other man-made inventions, the system is not perfect, but it should be encouraged to grow to be bold and creative in the future.

As voluntary hospitals, we cannot avoid our community service responsibilities. It is all too easy to leave the caring mission to the nurses and doctors while promoting the institutional image as an efficient production unit, but not qualifying as a community resource to help those in need. The public holds a variety of opinions of how hospitals should operate. While some feel hospitals are too business-like, others feel they are not enough like a business.

We must not forget the commitment to high quality health care in modern, up-to-date facilities and in a setting in which education, research and concern for the interests of the individual, both employee and patient, are strong, guiding values. It is these elements that make community service possible. For survival, that dedication of hospitals toward community service must remain strong.

The ultimate goal of voluntary hospitals is to return patients to healthy, independent lives. People from all walks of life make Philadelphia a rich, creative place to live and work. Our role is critical in maintaining the vitality of our community.



Fight till the last gasp.

— Shakespeare

The hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world.

— William Ross Wallace