

Citizens and doctors: Taking control of health care

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The challenges in our health care system are many, but Kenosha County's experience with the Wisconsin Medical Society-sponsored Citizen Congress gives me reason to be optimistic. This forum gave physicians and patients the power to develop a vision and dream, and start the process of changing the health care system for the better.

As president of the Kenosha County Medical Society, I agreed to participate in this effort to increase communication between physicians and patients because I've pledged to serve my community. And this form of service is indeed valuable. So when the Wisconsin Medical Society called for a Citizen Congress, I committed myself for whole weekends in November 2003 and October 2004. The Wisconsin Medical Society has supported the development of this dialogue, representing an interactive, integrated approach between citizen consumers and physicians.

After our initial Congress in the Wisconsin Dells, the Society urged the participants to go back

to their counties to involve more doctors, hospitals, and citizens in local Congresses to discuss mutual goals. We held a Citizen Congress in Kenosha County, and were recognized by the Society's Board of Directors at their 2005 Annual Meeting for our success. This would have been impossible without the enthusiasm of my colleagues and friends who also are committed to better serving patients.

Traditional economic models have never worked well to understand and improve health services. We need new models of human service that prize relationships over all, but that also recognize the reality of intolerably high health costs. Keeping this in mind, at the Kenosha County Citizen Congress we invited community leaders to offer their vision of what the ideal health care system should look like. This was achieved through their participation in facilitated conversation using appreciative inquiry. When citizens and physicians developed ideal standards together, we were surprised to find the answers were strikingly similar. Citizens realized that physicians are as concerned about their health care as they are. They also began to understand that doctors can't always provide ideal care because they

are prevented by problems in our health system.

Physicians are the health leaders of the community and our citizens rely on us for our expertise. No one can understand better than a physician what is necessary to provide high quality health care. We all must work together to achieve the guiding principles for health care reform:

- Universal health insurance coverage
- High quality health care
- Control of health care costs

And having experienced this dialogue between patients and doctors, I know that together we can lead the way to creating a smarter, more accessible health care system.

Another way we are working to improve health care is to get involved with current legislation. In July 2006, Brian Hettrick, MD, and David Mohammad accompanied me to see Wisconsin Senator Russell Decker to discuss his universal health plan for Wisconsin. We raised the point that there is no physician on board while a very important health plan is being written. The Senator promised he would look into it.

We are hopeful that physicians and patients alike will continue to have a voice in improving the health care system.

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