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Healthcare in Southeast Texas

By: James L. Holly, MD

There has never been a time when there was a greater need for collaboration between healthcare providers – hospitals, physicians, patients, insurance companies, employers and vendors of healthcare supplies. The building of new and bigger hospitals and the adding of new and innovative tests and treatments are not solving our healthcare problems.

1. In reality, advances in healthcare have created as many problems as they have solved.
2. Ultimately, technologic advances in healthcare have not taken away the responsibility of everyone for their own health.
3. Ultimately, we each are responsible for the choices we make, even though many of us are looking for someone to blame for the vicissitudes which afflict our lives.
4. In reality, all of the technologically advanced health interventions in the world cannot remedy the destructive effects of wrong choices made by many people, who then look to healthcare providers and organizations both to provide and to pay for corrective measures.

We all live with at least three realities in the healthcare industry today. Each of these realities represent at the same time:

1. Public policy dilemmas for government,
2. Ethical challenges for society, and
3. Personal problems for individuals and families.

The reality is that there is no possibility of healthcare financing and management ever returning to the laizze faire style practiced up until twenty years ago. Someone is going

to control and manage healthcare. The only real question is, “Who?” The three realities facing healthcare today are:

1. The financing of healthcare will never return to a system where the medical-decision-making process takes place in isolation and independent from the question of “Who is going to pay for the services?”
2. The financing of healthcare will never return to a system where the medical-decision-making process takes place in isolation and independent from the questions of, “How much is a service worth and how much is society willing to pay for it?” Because of the expense of technology and because of increasing access to healthcare by a larger population, it is possible for healthcare alone to bankrupt the United States government. The cost of healthcare produces the public policy issue, the ethical dilemma and the personal problems mentioned above.
3. The financing of healthcare will never return to a system where the medical-decision-making process takes place in isolation and independent from the question of, “What is society’s responsibility to its most vulnerable citizens as far as access to affordable healthcare is concerned?”

The United States government has assumed, by law, the responsibility of providing healthcare to a certain segment of our population, and the government is not going to surrender that responsibility.

The facts of this reality are explained by the AAPCC – the Actual Average Per Capita Cost. This is a calculated figure based on CMS (Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services), expenditures for healthcare in the United States. It is calculated on a county-by-county basis for every county in America.

The problem for employers, for government and for society is clarified by the following facts. The standard of acceptable care in only two instances exposes the truth of all of the above.

The American College of Cardiology has established that the standard of care, for anyone who has had a cardiac stent, is that they should have an annual Persantine Cardiolyte study.

The American College of Radiology has established that the standard of care, for anyone diagnosed with cancer, is that they should have a PET scan.

Here is the reality. Both of these tests, individually, cost as much as, or more than, the total, annual expenditure for the total care of individual Medicare recipients in America.

Do you see the problem?

1. If one test, doubles the total cost of care, and there are many such tests, and
2. If those tests become the national standard of care and
3. If everyone wants to blame someone else for their poor health, or their poor outcome of their healthcare and
4. If everyone wants someone else to pay for their healthcare,

Well, as the radio comedian said 70 years ago, “What’s my problem, boys?” Here’s your problem, you may, as the comedian did, want to give it back, but it will not go away.

Does the cost of healthcare impact your businesses bottom line? You bet it does!

Together we can solve this problem, but divided, we shall only watch as the problem continues to run out of control.