

A DHMC AFFILIATION FOR GREATER GOOD

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For the Valley News

LAST FEBRUARY, when Dartmouth-Hitchcock Health and CMC Healthcare System announced a letter of intent to pursue an affiliation, we knew there would be questions and concerns. Understandably, these concerns seem to come from both a fear of the unknown as well as a fear that history might be repeating itself.

During the past year, we have consulted with hundreds of people, both individually and in groups, who wanted to understand better the implications of the affiliation. Some wanted to ensure that this would not be a repeat of the failed Optima experiment that ended in June 2000 with the dissolution of a six-year merger between Catholic Medical Center and Elliot Hospital. Pro-life and pro-choice groups sought clarity about the provision of women's health and reproductive services. Others wanted to ensure that charitable care would remain at the heart of each institution's mission. Finally, policymakers and others wanted to understand how this affiliation would fit within the broader health care reform initiatives being debated in Washington.

We take all of these issues seriously, and we have continually tried to provide as much information as possible and address each issue openly. In addition, we're sponsoring a series of public hearings, like the one in Lebanon this evening, in order to answer your questions and hear your concerns about the affiliation.

Here, however, we want to restate a few key points

about the proposed affiliation.

■ First, Dartmouth-Hitchcock Health and CMC Healthcare System share a fundamental commitment to improving the health of the people in the greater Manchester area by enhancing their ability to access the highest quality health care services. This affiliation will be a natural and exciting extension of each organization's strategic efforts, vision and mission. Simply stated, we can do more to achieve this mission together than we can separately.

■ Second, we each feel very strongly that for this affiliation to be successful, it is vital that we maintain our unique identities and continue to provide the same health care choices that our patients have come to expect. We cannot stress the point strongly enough that this is an affiliation, not a merger where two corporations become one. Our integration will make our shared endeavors consistently yield the best outcomes for our patients in an efficient and cost-effective manner.

■ Finally, as you consider the implications of this affiliation, we ask you to look at what our two institutions have already accomplished by working jointly over the past five years to address unmet needs without creating wasteful redundancy. These collaborations include specialty cancer care, maternity services, cardiology, expanded primary care, hospitalist services and a community health clinic for low-income residents. All of these efforts have strengthened our collective ability to provide increased access and care

options to the greater Manchester community. Importantly, they have done so not by building new capacity, but by making the best use of each organization's respective strengths. The same principles that have driven our collaboration to date will continue to be at the heart of our future affiliation.

This affiliation can put New Hampshire at the forefront of fundamental change in our health care system. As government grapples with the intricacies of health care reform, it is clear that greater emphasis will be placed on providing care that is integrated, accessible and focused on value and measurable quality outcomes.

We expect there to be further discussion of all aspects of this affiliation, and we welcome it. Through the upcoming public hearings and our ongoing outreach, we will continue to answer your questions. However, we sincerely hope that the implications for improving the health of the people of the region remain a central focus of the public discourse around this affiliation. We look forward to continuing the delivery of integrated and effective care to the people of the greater Manchester area in the years ahead.

Dr. Thomas A. Colacchio is president of Dartmouth-Hitchcock Health. The community forum in Lebanon will be held this evening from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. at the Upper Valley Senior Center. For more information about the public forums and the proposed affiliation, visit www.ahealthiertomorrow.org.