

EYE-Q

by R. Thomas Barowsky, MD

Local Hospitals and the Survival of the Community

This week's column is taking a slightly different direction. Instead of discussing a specific topic in eye care I would like to take the opportunity to discuss an equally important subject that directly affects not only the eye health of this community but the general health and financial well being of our community for us today and for our children tomorrow.

As we all read in the papers, see on TV and hear on the radio our nation faces a major crisis in health care funding for everyone. I'm not going to get into the politics of who should pay for what or who should be eligible to receive what services and at what costs. These are decisions that are being made by people who claim to be much smarter and more visionary than I. What I want to discuss is the value of a community hospital such as Sampson Regional Medical Center to the health and viability of the community it serves.

Many recent studies have looked at the impact of a community hospital on the cost of health care. Studies done in Minnesota and Massachusetts, specifically, and by the General Accounting Office (GAO) strongly support the dollar value of local care. Without a local hospital to provide services unique to that community the overall cost of providing care goes up significantly.

The cost to provide care in secondary and tertiary care centers is more expensive, requires a significant commitment to provide transportation, whether by family members or a medical transport system, increases the out-of-pocket costs to the family for expenses such as hotels, meals and lost wages and fractionates the continuity of care between the patient and their family doctor.

The value of a community hospital to the community it serves extends well beyond the medical care it offers. According to several studies on the subject, most communities, especially in rural areas can either grow or perish financially based on the proximity to a quality healthcare system that includes a variety of primary and specialty physicians, ancillary nursing services and quality hospital facilities.

Business and industry looking to locate in communities much like Clinton and the surrounding area look for quality, affordable housing and excellent schools. Of great importance is the access to quality care from primary care providers to specialty services in a timely and cost-effective manner that ensures a minimum time away from work and ensures that the families of employees are well cared for.

The city and county benefit when new business and industry locate in a community because of a larger tax base that enables local government to better provide the services we expect from government. Local businesses grow because they provide more goods

and services to more people and businesses. In this way everyone benefits from a thriving economic picture.

Sampson County is fortunate to have a medical facility that provides first rate care for its citizens. The mix of specialty care and primary care is better than in many larger communities. The hospital staff is first rate and the hospital has a strong commitment to supporting the community it serves.

Where the hospital suffers most is from community support for its ongoing operations. There are many dedicated people and professionals in the community who understand the importance of ensuring the survival of the hospital especially in these tough economic times. Unfortunately, there are a large number of people who, by choice or by direction from their medical caregivers, leave the community for their medical and surgical procedures; procedures that are competently performed every day at Sampson Regional Medical Center by the dedicated physicians and staff. This is very unfortunate.

How can the hospital hope to recruit competent physicians to the community if they don't have the support and backing of the community? Why would a business locate here if they can't be assured that quality medical care will always be available?

It is important for everyone to support their local businesses and Medical Center if they want Sampson County and the City of Clinton to prosper now and in to the future. Every medical procedure that could be performed here but is not, is basically a nail in the coffin to the future of our Medical Center and the health of the City of Clinton and of Sampson County. Let your healthcare provider know that you would prefer to receive your care locally whenever possible. You will not only save time and money but you will help ensure the future of quality medical care for everyone in Sampson County.

If you have questions about your eye health e-mail Dr. Barowsky at doctom@tdkj.com and we'll try to answer your questions here at Eye-Q.