



VIEW*S* & VISIONS

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West Virginia's Hospitals: Mission Driven and Ready to Serve

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Joseph M. Letnaunchyn is President and CEO of the West Virginia Hospital Association (WVHA), a position he has held since November 2006. He is responsible for the oversight of all activities affecting West Virginia's hospitals and health systems before the West Virginia Legislature and congressional delegation in Washington, DC, state regulatory agencies and West Virginia's business community. He previously served as President and CEO of the Hospital Association in Delaware and Vice President for Health Care Finance with The Hospital Association of Pennsylvania.

Letnaunchyn serves as Board Chair of the West Virginia Health Information Network, a statewide public-private partnership to implement a statewide health information exchange for hospitals and other health care providers. He also serves as a board member of the West Virginia Board of Banking and Financial Institutions and the West Virginia Education Alliance, and is an active member of the West Virginia Roundtable and the West Virginia Business and Industry Council.

Additionally, Letnaunchyn currently serves as a member of the American Hospital Association's (AHA) Regional Policy Board, the State Hospital Association's Allied Advisory Committee on Medicaid Reform and the AHAPAC Steering Committee.

He holds an undergraduate degree in accounting, *cum laude*, from Mount St. Mary's College and a master's in Health Services Administration from the University of St. Francis.

I've worked in health care for most of my career, but never have I seen the pace of change that our health care system is currently experiencing. It touches all of us – health care providers, employers, insurers, policymakers and, most importantly, our patients.

The national and state health care landscape continues to shift dramatically. Facing the transformative and challenging evolution of private and public insurance; ongoing policy changes in Medicare and Medicaid programs affecting provider payment and delivery system reforms; state budget pressures; the expansion of Medicaid-managed care and more, the West Virginia Hospital Association (WVHA) and its member hospitals and health systems have been there every step of the way – for more than 90 years in fact!

Although change is what seems to best describe the health care industry these days, there are



constants that remain at the core of WVHA's member hospitals and health systems, such as the mission to provide safe, high-quality care in order to create a healthy West Virginia. This mission to serve is at the forefront of everything our hospitals do, regardless of the constant financial, regulatory and political pressures that they encounter.

I frequently hear reports from across the nation about how hospital mission statements become mere fixtures on the wall, tacked casually beside strategic planning documents of the past with no relevance or meaning for staff, stakeholders or the communities they serve. I can say with confidence that the 63 member hospitals and health systems of the WVHA do not fall into this category. Every day, West Virginia hospitals,





with their leaders and community board members, are working to bring their missions to life with inspiration and relevance.

A generation ago, a community hospital was the traditional site for most care. Today, our hospitals and multi-hospital health systems continue to provide comprehensive inpatient services and extensive emergency departments, but they have also transitioned to offering modern, state-of-the-art outpatient centers that provide extensive outpatient surgery options; new technologies; comprehensive primary care; treatment for patients with opioid dependency; and extensive lab tests, to name a few.

According to the American Hospital Association, trends indicate that while inpatient stays are becoming shorter, outpatient visits are rising because of new technologies, reimbursement rules and new payment policies. Our hospital leaders are responding to these changes by reorganizing and streamlining their care delivery processes, with the goal of improving quality across the continuum of care. The shift from inpatient to outpatient care isn't the end game, but simply a start toward a more integrated model that reaches patients in other settings.

Our hospitals are not only embracing new technologies to provide care in other settings, they are also incorporating new tech trends for patient treatment. Mobile health care tools, such as patient engagement apps, mobile-optimized patient portals and remote patient monitoring, are just a few examples. In fact, mobile and wireless devices, often referred to as “connected health tools,” hold the promise of positively impacting the future delivery of patient care. These tools are projected to become increasingly important as our hospitals explore ways to provide quality care at a lower cost, while at the same time increasing patient satisfaction.

When I started my health care career in the mid-1970s, the hospital's role was to take in patients, place them in hospital beds, treat their conditions and make them better before discharging them home after a several-day stay. Today, our hospitals coordinate with a network of post-acute providers and are tasked with taking care of the broader population, identifying the most dominant local health challenges and providing proactive care that helps keep people out of hospital beds. This pace of change is stunning.

So, whether it's a trend toward outpatient services, new technology or a greater

emphasis on care coordination, the foundation of our hospitals rests on a mission that focuses on the patient and recognizes the important place that hospitals hold in our local community. It's also a foundation that recognizes the essential and modernized role that our state's more than 44,000 hospital professionals play in our health care delivery system.

There are many excellent examples of how West Virginia hospitals and their dedicated health care professionals are meeting the mission of patient care and service through a variety of new and innovative methods. Take the opportunity to learn more from a hospital or a health care leader in your community. After all, the care provided by West Virginia's hospitals, at its core, remains about caring for people. And despite all the changes, *it always will.* ▽