

Regional Health Planning: A Call for Urgent Action!

With a new President and Governor it would seem appropriate to relate *Health & Medicine's* programs and perspectives to the new situation. Obviously the economic meltdown determines to a large degree all undertakings. But in reality this merely means seeking the goals we have worked toward for the past 28 years is all the more urgent and our programs more imperative.

Let's review one of these on the *Health & Medicine* agenda:

Regional health planning: the present health jurisdictions have for decades been defined been ever more inappropriately by geographic boundaries; thus we have a Chicago Department of Public Health and a Cook County Health and Hospitals System. These jurisdictional definitions are archaic if for no other reason that that they were created 150 years ago. The result is an inefficient, duplicative and ultimately unsuccessful public health and health care capability. One contemporary statistic is emblematic of the larger problem. The three Cook County hospitals, Stroger Hospital, Provident and Oak Forest are the only public hospitals in the northeast corner of the state. Stroger's serious responsibilities are aggravated by the fact that 5-10 percent of patient visits are people who live outside the county. This reality calls out for resolution, not by barring non-residents from care, but from integration of care appropriate to the larger geo-political constellation.

Health & Medicine has addressed this central challenge for the past three years and has met with surprisingly affirmative response from the various stakeholders in the area. The various leaders have developed their solutions to the point where larger public awareness and political response at the local and state level is needed. We will be holding a regionwide (7 counties) Health Care Summit where recommendations will be presented for wider leadership approval. We trust that the new governor will soon endorse this effort.