

# Community health care forum held at Knights of Columbus

by Alice E. Gerard

The current state of health care and four potential future scenarios for health care in Western New York were discussed a community forum, held on Sept. 18 at the Knights of Columbus, Council 4752, 1841 Whitehaven Road.

The community discussion, which was one of the Knights of Columbus' monthly lecture series, according to Bill Gworek Sr., was sponsored by the Community Health Foundation of Western and Central New York. This discussion was part of the 1 Friday, 4 Futures community conversation, the regional health care initiative designed to gather input from the various communities in Western New York on ways to improve the area's health care system. Thus far, approximately 70 of these discussions have been held throughout Western New York, and about 20 or 30 more are scheduled through the end of October, Levy said.

The community conversation was facilitated by Denise Levy of the Community Health Foundation of Western and Central New York.

The discussion began with several questions from Levy. She wanted to know who used the health care system and who had heard about the changes that were occurring, such as mergers and closings. Nearly everyone answered yes to both of those questions. She then asked, "Did everyone get your phone call where someone asked you what you thought about (the changes) or about how you wanted to see things changed in the future?"

No one had.

Levy then wanted to know if people had stories of positive experiences that they had in the

health care system.

A woman talked about getting knee replacement surgery. "I have osteoarthritis. I was 56 years old. I knew that, in the olden days, when you got knee replacements, you had to be 80 years old. And so, I said, 'When do you think I can get a new knee?' The doctor said, 'When you cry uncle, that's when we do it.' In 2006, I received two brand new knees. I didn't have to pay one penny. The treatment and the physical therapy were wonderful."

A man talked about what happened to him after triple bypass surgery. "After I was out for a while, I started going downhill. The doctor said, 'We've got to get you a pacemaker/defibrillator.' The night before I was to go for surgery at ECMC, I didn't think that I was going to make it in the hospital. That's how bad I was. They put this pacemaker/defibrillator in. Thank God I'm still here. I feel like a million dollars."

According to Levy, these stories and other stories related by the participants, told her that "the surgery was successful and the coverage was there. You received the follow-through care and the therapy, and you were able to focus on your healing, as opposed to bills and payments." She added that, in the stories of positive medical experiences, especially with knee replacement surgeries, the patients managed their own care and decided when they needed the treatment.

The group then discussed four possible scenarios of future health care, all set on the same date, Friday, June 22, 2018. The first related a bleak tale of a diabetic man in an overcrowded

emergency room who had to have his leg amputated because he had no health insurance and could not obtain insulin or syringes. The second told the tale of a woman who had a heart attack and was told that insurance would pay for medicine but not for the help that she wanted to quit smoking or lose weight. With no follow-up care, the woman resumed an unhealthy lifestyle and, 14 months later, had a second heart attack. The third shared the story of a man who used his debit card to pay for instruction from a physician's assistant in managing his diabetes. Others in this scenario purchased health care by "riding plastic ponies" (maxing out their credit cards). The fourth described a man receiving a noninvasive colon screening from a doctor who was familiar with him and his family. Each story reflected different actions taken by Congress, from doing nothing to providing universal access to health care.

Discussion centered on a variety of topics. One suggestion was for people to go to walk-in clinics, instead of emergency rooms, for non-life threatening ailments. Others suggested more opportunities for people to become educated on how to live a healthy lifestyle.

The topic of incentives from insurance companies for people who live a healthy lifestyle generated some debate. "Start teaching people how to take care of themselves. You can't smoke your whole life and eat bad food and expect a healthy person to bail you out when you get sick," said one person. "There are certain health conditions that are genetic and beyond your control,"

one individual said. Another one said, "There are a lot of factors that affect someone's lifestyle and they are not always able to do everything that they should. Do people want to be overweight? Most people you talk to will say no. How do you lose weight? It ain't that easy."

Another topic mentioned was the cost of advertising medications on television. "They should just put a stop to that nonsense," said one person. Another one added, "In the commercials, they rave about this product and then they give you 15 things that can happen. I wouldn't take these medicines if they force me to." Also mentioned was visiting physician's assistants, instead of doctors. Comments included "If you feel that the physician's assistant doesn't know what he's doing, you say, I don't agree with you; I want to see the doctor," and "A physician's assistant is more thorough."

People also said that they liked the idea of a non-invasive colon screening and use of technology via a "virtual surgery link."

Levy said that the Community Health Foundation of Western and Central New York is collaborating with the University at Buffalo Regional Institute, the P2 Collaborative of WNY Inc., and the John R. Oishei Foundation to put on this program. Sharon Falkowski, also of the Community Foundation, took notes so that the comments could be included with the rest of the data that is currently being compiled.

For more information on the initiative, check <http://www.rx4excellence.org/> or call the SUNY at Buffalo Regional Institute at 829-3777.