

What's going to be our health care future?

Ray's back on the road! After falling seriously ill nearly a year ago — and in the process getting seriously near the abyss — my father somehow managed to hit the road to Wellville — albeit with baby steps.

Along the way, he got a lot of help and seemingly all the health care support he could ever want, and now he's reclaimed his life for the most part.

He's even driving again.

Earlier in another column, I wondered what my medical future might be like when I'm his age in about 35 years. "A 'Soylent Green'-like scenario wouldn't appall me so much as a long, lingering, painful situation," I wrote.

Recently, four health care futures

COMMENTARY



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PHOTOS BY JOE KISSEL/CONTRIBUTOR

ROAD AGAIN: Ray Kissel's recovery from life-threatening pancreatitis has gone from grim to a return to normalcy, including driving again.

were imagined at the Knights of Columbus on Whitehaven when an audience of about 20 gathered to hear what Friday night in 2018 could be like if you suddenly found yourself getting checked in at the worst possible time.

My father and our family was



JOE KISSEL/CONTRIBUTOR

FUTURE SHOCK: At the Knights of Columbus, residents gathered recently to listen to dramatic readings of four medical futures WNY could be facing.

lucky enough this time around to get everything we needed.

But for one of the scenarios entitled "Heaven Helps Us All," the story goes a little darker. "The recession of 2013 echoed the

previous downturns in 2008 and 2010," a dramatic voice narrated from a CD player at the front of the room. "In the meantime, Congress was unable to enact any kind of health care reform."

In the hospital that Friday night, an out-of-work man with diabetes finds out he's going to lose his leg because he couldn't regularly afford insulin.

I bet the guy who runs this hospital has a doctor," the man said. "And I bet he can afford whatever he needs — probably at another hospital."

His doctor responds, "Maybe in another city."

That's a reference to why the discussion series sponsors, Reaching for Excellence, say they're going to communities all over Western New York, presenting these options and gauging the reaction of people.

"Several factors position Western New York for fundamental change in its health care system," they say. "These include rising health care costs; mandated reconfiguration of our hospitals and nursing homes; a rapidly aging population with increasing health

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needs; a poorly defined safety net in both urban and rural areas; a looming crisis in health workforce shortages, including physicians and nurses; the need for significant investment in health-related information technology; and an increasing reliance on the medical and health science industry as a major economic engine for our region.”

That’s a scary mouthful.

“At the same time, the region has an increasing number of organizations and people committed to a stronger community voice in health care investment decisions.”

Other scenarios included a less desperate future where “cost-cutting was a priority for Congress in 2010, resulting in the ER being reserved for the most serious emergencies.”

“Entrepreneurial medical associations, as well as religious and community-based groups, set up 24-hour clinics where physicians assistants and nurse practitioners handle most fevers, stitches and broken bones,” the narrator said. “Companies that still offered insurance began to rely upon prevention, giving incentives for healthy lifestyles.”

In scenarios like this, my father’s care might seem extravagant: More than 100 days in the hospital, surgeries for pancreatitis as well as a small army of nurses and therapists at home that sometimes seemed like they were wasting their time on him.

But somehow — almost down to day — the fog lifted, his appetite and weight increased, and one by one the recovery milestones accumulated.

That’s the future Reaching for Excellence envisions for us all “when in

2010 Congress passes the Universal Access to Health Care bill.”

“In Western New York, health facilities and providers merged to form more efficient delivery systems; medicine focused on prevention and education with classes on nutrition, exercise, smoking prevention and substance abuse.”

While the current state of Wall Street and the overall economy has led the presidential candidates off the topic of health care reform, sooner or later we’ve got to get back on that path and come up with a consensus as to what future we want.

After some really shaky moments, my father is truly grateful he pulled through his most serious illness.

But what in the future can we expect to help get us through?

Only our actions — and time — will tell ...

Joseph Kissel covers Grand Island for the Record.