

Hospitals Need 'Systems Thinking'

By CAL THOMAS
Tribune Media Services

Is there anyone in America who doesn't know that our hospitals are in trouble, along with the rest of the health care system?

Three reports released last week by the Institute of Medicine confirm that. As *The Washington Post* summarized it, "Emergency medical care in the United States is on the verge of collapse."



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Dangerous overcrowding and an inability to provide necessary expertise to treat patients in a safe, timely and efficient manner are the main reasons.

The report recommends that Congress should create a new federal agency and

spend billions of dollars to fix the problem.

That is the worst possible recommendation, because it is not a solution. Another federal agency is precisely what is not needed. What we need is "Systems thinking."

What is "systems thinking?" As described by veteran reporter Lloyd Dobyns in a new documentary for Public Television that has received some airings, but needs to be viewed more widely, "systems thinking" is "basically how you see things. Instead of seeing a huge mess with one problem piled on top of another, you see differently. You see with what people call 'new eyes.' You see how you and your work fit into the system, and how you and your work connect to the other people in the system."

This is not theory. It is being tried at several hospitals throughout the country,

reducing patient waiting time, dramatically cutting costs and delivering quality care to patients, making them happier and healthier. It has also resulted in doctors, nurses and other hospital workers enjoying their jobs more instead of worrying about other things. With systems thinking, the patient comes first and when that happens, other concerns take care of themselves.

This is what is known as the "Toyota model." When one focuses on the person or customer and his or her satisfaction, profits and efficiency result.

The PBS documentary, titled "Good News: How Hospitals Heal Themselves," shows how St. Joseph's hospital in St. Charles, Mo., adopted "systems thinking," dramatically improving its emergency care. Simple things like moving the X-ray room closer to the emergency room, allowing doctors to get their X-

rays faster; or coordinating with housekeeping so that a room is clean when a patient needs it, thus reducing waiting time, has substantially reduced costs, increased efficiency and contributed to patient satisfaction.

St. Joseph's set a time limit of 30 seconds for an emergency room patient with life- or limb-threatening symptoms to be seen by a health care professional. All others would be under active care within 30 minutes of arrival. At the time of the filming, St. Joseph's performance record for these goals was 90 percent. They even hired a "hospitality person" who keeps patients informed as to what is happening, again contributing to patient contentment.

Lloyd Dobyns says, "You have to see the whole hospital system. You have to see how blaming people does not help. You have to see how to practice continu-

al improvement." At St. Joseph's and at 40 hospitals in the Pittsburgh area, which the producers also examined, everything is focused on the patients. "It is not focused on reducing staff, reducing costs, or improving profits," says Dobyns. "But as you focus on the patients, all the other things occur naturally. You want to help the hospital? Help the patients." In hospitals where "systems thinking" is used, health care costs have been reduced by as much as half.

This proven system does not require more staff or expensive consultants and it certainly does not need another bureaucratic, costly and inefficient government agency, which can only make things worse. Improvements can be made, says Dobyns, starting today and in every hospital in the country. Costs will decline.

"So the question now becomes, can we (See THOMAS, Page 8)

WAYCROSS JOURNAL-HERALD

ROGER L. WILLIAMS
Publisher

JACK WILLIAMS III
Editor

Founded 1875

400 Isabella St.
Waycross, Ga. 31501

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P-5 Waycross Journal-Herald, Wednesday, June 21, 2006

Thought for Today

"Jesus cried and said: 'He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me.'" John 12:44

Moses: I've Been Slandered

The race for Carlos Nelson's District 1 seat on the Ware County Commission is about to get nasty. Democratic challenger Luberta Moses claims one of Nelson's supporters, James McDaniel, is removing her campaign signs from strategic locations inside the district and spreading malicious falsehoods about her private life.

According to Ms. Moses, Mr. McDaniel is slandering her name to potential voters by claiming she's involved in a romantic affair with Waycross City Commissioner and Waycross NAACP President Norman Davis. Mr. Davis and the candidate are cousins.

The candidate denies she's involved in a romantic relationship with Mr. Davis. She told the *Journal-Herald* Tuesday she has witnesses who are prepared to testify in her behalf. She said she plans to speak with her attorney and file a lawsuit against Mr. McDaniel for slander.

For his part, Mr. McDaniel says he never made any such claim to voters in District 1. He also insists he's not guilty of removing candidate Moses' signs.

"I never told that to nobody," he said by phone Tuesday afternoon. "She can go ahead (and sue) if she wants to."

Mr. McDaniel, who is approximately 80 years of age, admits to posting Nelson's campaign signs near Ms. Moses' "Vote For Change" signs. Nelson's signs read: "Change For What?"

"We don't touch people's signs," Nelson said in a separate phone conversation Tuesday. "But we have been putting signs up next to hers," he admitted.

Meanwhile, GOP challenger R. C. "Dick" Champagne charged in a letter submitted to the *Journal-Herald* this week that, "The people of District 1 are the most ignored citizens in Waycross and Ware County."

Noting that the district has 4,500 less voters than other districts in Ware County, he said this fact is a "blatant, modern-day example of 'taxation without representation.'"

According to Champagne, the people of District 1 have to contend with an extraordinary amount of street crime. "The crime and drug activity has increased...to the point where law-abiding residents are not safe and secure in their homes," he said.

Citing rampant drug trafficking, prostitution and theft, Champagne said law-abiding citizens living in District 1 can't sit on their porches in the evening without being approached by drug peddlers selling illegal street drugs. "They will walk past your house and ask if you want to buy something, or they'll walk onto your porch and ask to use the phone," Champagne complained.

If Commissioner Nelson wants to know what needs to be changed, said Champagne, he and several Waycross city commissioners representing overlapping city districts need to take a close, hard look at the growing street crime problem inside District 1.

Yes, the political pot is beginning to boil in the Ware County Commission District 1 race. Voters are reminded that the Democratic and Republican preference primaries are scheduled for July 18.

Delay Embraces Partisanship

By KATHRYN JEAN LOPEZ
Newspaper Enterprise Assn.

As Congressman Tom DeLay exited stage right earlier this month, he issued an important reminder: to love partisanship.

Yes, partisanship — the same thing that keeps the two different sides of the aisle on two different sides of the aisle. But good partisanship.

Delivering his last speech on the floor of the House, the Texas Republican got to the heart of it. "In preparing for today, I found that it is customary in speeches such as these to reminisce about the good old days of political harmony and across-the-aisle camaraderie, and to lament the bitter, divisive partisan rancor that supposedly now weakens our democracy. I can't do that. Because partisanship, Mr. Speaker — properly understood — is not a symp-

tom of a democracy's weakness, but of its health and strength."

Now, I know that statement is contrary to just about everything anyone casually thinks about public life: Find common ground. Don't get stuck on stupid blood-letting. Rise above politics.

But rough-and-tumble politics is what the Beltway is about. It's essential, and lawmakers reject it at their own peril.

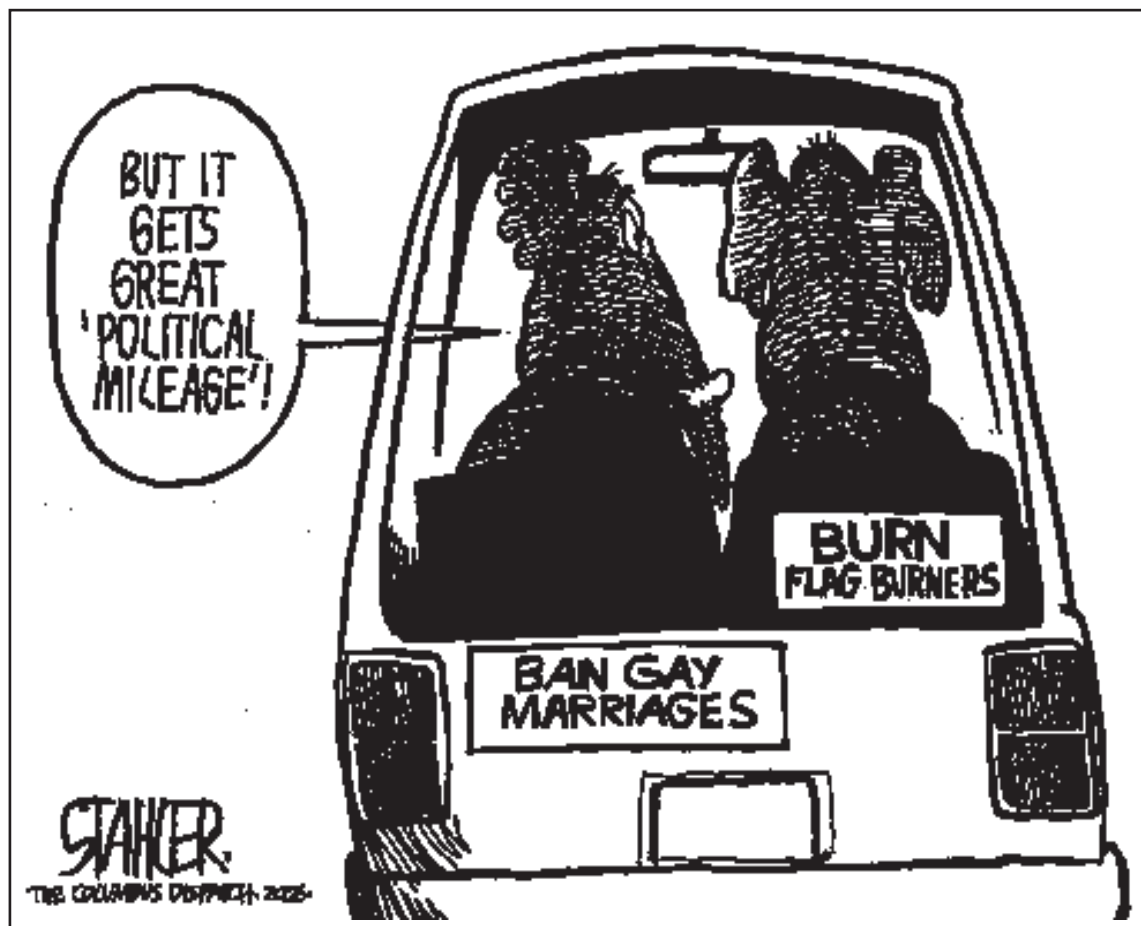
I'm an "opinion journalist" and editor, so my days are about partisanship. That doesn't mean I sacrifice the truth of things simply to support these opinions. Nor does it mean I'm a my-party-is-always-right gal. But it does mean that I have core principles — many of which I happen to share with most of the people around the office, just as those at a liberal magazine would with their editors. And you know what? While we rarely agree on much, a debate between the two sides is often a worthwhile endeavor.

As DeLay pointed out about Democrats and Republicans in his farewell speech, "On first principles ... we disagree. And so we

debate — often loudly, and often in vain — to convince our opponents and the American people of our point of view. We debate here on the House floor. We debate in committees. We debate on television, and on radio, and on the Internet, and in the newspapers. And then every two years, we have a HUGE debate ... and then in November we see who won. That is not rancor. That is democracy!" And if we're really debating first principles, and policy prescriptions based on them, our dialogue is never in vain.

Needless to say I'm not — and it's not good civics to be — for all partisanship. There is poisonous partisanship, too. The kind of partisanship that appears with even a cursory look at the congressional career of DeLay, who became known as "The Exterminator," which gave Democrats verbal artillery, using the fact that he was once a blue-collar guy killing bugs in Texas as an insult.

Fevered partisanship is bad news. In a way, this is the point of former Washington Post reporter (See LOPEZ, Page 8)



Our Readers Say

Sirmans' Candidacy Backed Swindlers After Your Money

EDITOR, Journal-Herald:

If it only took a well-manicured lawn for voters to be able to judge a person as a good candidate for public office, it would make it easier to vote.

Unfortunately, it takes more than that. Personally I try to look for the integrity of a person, not whether their yards are groomed.

If that is how some people are choosing candidates maybe that is what the problem has been. I will be voting for candidate Ronnie Sirmans in the Third District race for his integrity, not his landscape.

Janice J. Burney
Waycross

EDITOR, Journal-Herald:

There have been several news stories and at least one editorial in the *Journal-Herald* about today's crop of slimeball swindlers who prey on gullible, trusting, usually elderly, people who are least able to lose money to these jackals out to fleece the unwary. Usually these scams are as old as the hills — the Nigerian lottery, the "I've found a purse full of money" scam, the old bait-and-switch game. They are all alive and well and in frequent use.

I have run across another con game so old it has whiskers: the old sacred miracle oil routine, in which you send the "prophet" \$35 or so and you'll get three miracles! What a bargain ... even in these inflationary times! \$11.66 miracles!

Oh, did I mention that the sucker has to soak three pieces of paper in the holy, green, miracle oil and send those with your \$35? That's the very same scam Father Divine was using 50 years ago! Only the cost of miracles has gone up. Communication to heaven is cordless now, and therefore costs more. American circus impresario P. T. Barnum said it right: "There's a sucker born every minute." (More now with the world population escalating so rapidly.)

A word of advice to all the church ladies out there who fervently want a miracle: The next time you get a letter from a prophet offering green miracle oil and miracles at \$11 a pop, run, don't walk, to the local post office and turn this garbage in to the postal inspector's office. He will work it so the prophet has to work a miracle to stay out of jail.

That sacred green oil is nothing but cheap vegetable oil dyed green. And one more thing: Miracles do happen. I have seen a couple of examples. But they were bought and paid for with faith and were given for free, not \$11 each.

Harrison R. Watts
Waycross

Keep Golf Carts Off Streets

EDITOR, Journal-Herald:

Golf carts belong on golf courses, not in the hands of children riding on city streets.

I have witnessed too many young children under the age of 16 riding them around unsupervised and recklessly.

When we can pass a city ordinance about trash cans being pulled in by 6 p.m., we ought to be able to do something about this. What is it going to take?

Will it take the death or injury of one or more of your neighbor's children to get something done?

Bruce Szabo
Waycross

Paul Gregory Schappagh
Mark S. Schappagh
Stephanie Schappagh-Howell
Houston, Texas