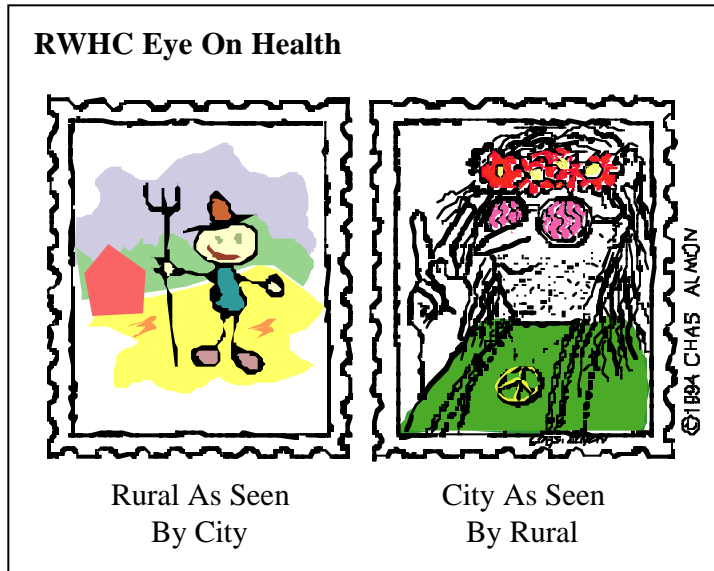


Review & Commentary on Health Policy Issues for a Rural Perspective – June 1st, 2002

“Luxury Politics Of An Academic Islander”

This article is from the longer and more complex piece, “The Prejudice Against Country People” by Wendell Berry in the April issue of *The Progressive*. Common problems and the political domination of the suburbs after the current round of political redistricting population make a pragmatic imperative that large cities and rural political alliances develop, and that process begins with addressing the “urban, rural” biases that divide us.



“On June 21, 2001, Richard Lewontin, a respected Harvard scientist, published in *The New York Review of Books* an article on genetic engineering and the controversy about it. In the latter part of his article, Lewontin turns away from his announced premise of scientific objectivity to attack, in a markedly personal way, the critics of industrial agriculture and biotechnology who are trying to defend small farmers against exploitation by global agribusiness... This is

not scientific objectivity or science or scholarship. It is the luxury politics of an academic islander.”

“The problem for Lewontin and others like him is that the faith in industrial agriculture as an eternal pillar of human society is getting harder to maintain, not because of the attacks of its opponents but because of the increasingly manifest failures of industrial agriculture itself: massive soil erosion, soil degradation, pollution by toxic chemicals, pollution by animal factory wastes, depletion of aquifers, runaway subsidies, the spread of pests and diseases by the long-distance transportation of food, mad cow disease, indifferent cruelty to animals, the many human sufferings associated with agricultural depression, exploitation of ‘cheap’ labor, the abuse of migrant workers.”

“That these problems exist and are serious is indisputable. So why are they so little noticed by politicians of influence, by people in the media, by university scientists and intellectuals? An increasing number of people alerted to the problems will answer immediately: Because far too many of those people are far too dependent on agribusiness contributions, advertising, and grants. That, I think, is true, but another reason that needs to be considered is modern society's widespread prejudice against country people.”

“Lewontin's condescension to country people and their problems is not an aberration either in our society or in *The New York Review of Books*. On June 29, 2000, that magazine published this sentence: ‘At worst, [Rebecca West] had a mind that was closed and cold, like a small town lawyer's, prizing facts but estranged from imaginative truth.’ And on December 20, 2001, it published this: ‘The Gridiron dinner drags on for about five hours, enlivened mainly by the speeches of the politicians, whose ghostwriters in recent years have consistently outdone the journalists in the sharpness and grace of their wit (leaving journalists from the provinces with a strong impulse to follow the groundhogs back into their holes).’ ”

“It is possible to imagine that some readers will ascribe my indignation at those sentences to the paranoia of an advocate for the losing side. But I would ask those readers to imagine a reputable journal nowadays that would attribute closed, cold minds to *Jewish* lawyers, or speak of *black* journalists wanting to follow the groundhogs into their holes.”

“Disparagements of farmers, of small towns, of anything identifiable as ‘provincial’ can be found everywhere: in comic strips, TV shows, newspaper editorials, literary magazines, and so on. A few years ago, *The New Republic* affirmed the necessity of the decline of family farms in a cover article entitled ‘The Idiocy of Rural Life.’ ”

“The small farmers and the people of small towns are understood as occupying the bottom step of the economic stairway and deservedly falling from it because they are rural, which is to say not metropolitan or cosmopolitan, which is to say socially, intellectually, and culturally inferior to ‘us.’ ”

“I am not trying to attribute any virtues or characteristics to farmers or rural people as a category. I am only saying what others have said many times before: These stereotypes don't fit. They don't work. Of course, some small town lawyers have minds that are ‘closed and cold,’ but some, too, have minds that are open and warm. And some ‘provincial’ journalists may be comparable to groundhogs, I suppose, though I know of none to whom that simile exactly applies, but some too are brilliant and brave and eminently useful. I am thinking, for example, of Tom and Pat Gish,

publishers of *The Mountain Eagle* in Whitesburg, Kentucky, who for many decades have opposed the coal companies whenever necessary and have unflinchingly suffered the penalties, including arson. Do I think the Gishes would be intimidated by the frivolous wit of ghostwriters at the Gridiron dinner? I do not.”

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## Read Or Reread This Classic On Leadership

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From *On Leadership*, by John W. Gardner, 1990:

“A particular problem for leaders today is that large numbers of people have torn loose from whatever cultural, religious or philosophical roots they may have known. Others have never known such roots. Various religions and secular philosophies continue to differ among themselves on questions of value. Scholars are fascinated with the *divergence* among value systems; but leaders, whose task it is to keep a society functioning, are always seeking the *common ground* that will make concerted action possible. They have no choice. It is virtually impossible to exercise leadership if shared values have disintegrated.”

“Unfortunately, the soil in which such values are rooted and nurtured—the family and community—is being blown away in the dust storm of contemporary life. I recognize that community is a subject rarely discussed in high policy circles—but that must change. In fact, it *is* changing. Interest in the rebuilding of community is a nationwide phenomenon.”

“It is important for leaders to help in restoring the face-to-face community—in the family and extended family, in schools, congregations, workplaces, neighborhoods. That is where shared values are generated, and if they decay that is where they decay.”

“Implicit in the term community is the idea of wholeness; but everything we know about cults and totalitarianism tells us there is such a thing as too much ‘wholeness.’ To prevent the wholeness from smothering diversity, there must be a tradition of pluralism and healthy dissent. To prevent the diversity from destroying the wholeness, there must be accommodation, coalition-building and well developed practices of dispute resolution. No leader today can doubt that the achievement of *wholeness incorporating diversity* is one of the transcendent goals of our time.”

“Leaders have always had to live with conflict. The ethnic conflicts burning so fiercely in every corner of the world today teach us anew that the destructive possibilities of hatred are limitless. The ancient human

**The Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative**, begun in 1979, intends to be a catalyst for regional collaboration, an aggressive and creative force on behalf of rural communities and rural health. RWHC promotes the preservation and furthers the development of a coordinated system of rural health care, which provides both quality and efficient care in settings that best meet the needs of rural residents in a manner consistent with their community values.

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impulse to hate and fear the tribe in the next valley, the ethnic group on the next block, those who are 'not like us' is deep-seated."

"In a vital community, conflict is inevitable and often healthy. The goal is not to eliminate conflict but to prevent it from escalating in destructive ways. Nationally and internationally, there must be institutionalized arrangements for conflict resolution, for the diminishing of polarization, for the building of bridges of understanding."

"Men and women must not only be stirred to enthusiasm for shared goals; their leaders must prepare them for the frustrations of getting there. And they must understand that the 'goal' isn't a true endpoint where we can climb into a hammock and relax, but a starting point for the next stage in endless renewal. Don't pray for the day when we finally solve our problems. Pray that we have the freedom to continue working on the problems the future will never cease to throw at us."

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## Medicare Tax Not Sustainable

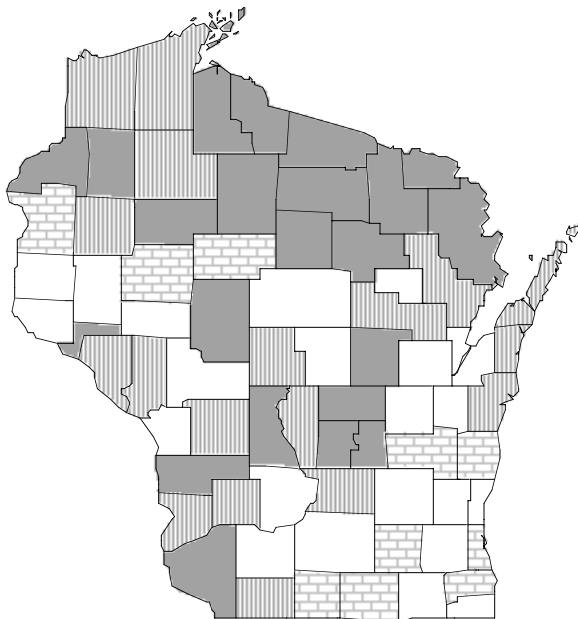
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In urban America, health care for Medicare beneficiaries is paid for by the federal government and the beneficiaries themselves. In most of rural America there is a third payer, the "hidden tax" of the cost shift to the private sector and their insurers.

Wisconsin's rural counties and other rural counties across the country are facing the future of America today—the waning ability of the private sector to absorb the Medicare induced cost shift.

**The Medicare cost shift to private payers (workers) which currently holds the rural infrastructure together, is not sustainable**—fewer workers per beneficiary are fueling a rapidly increasing price resistance in rural markets. The Congressional advisory body, MedPAC tells us we don't have a problem as all payer hospital margins (financed by the cost shift) are OK—they need to look more closely.

Wisconsin's Rural Counties Are America's Future Today  
Too Few Workers To Pay The Medicare Shortfall



WI Workers Per Beneficiary in 1999 (Period When Ratio Is US Average)

- greater than 3.7 (actual 1960 - 1970)
- range of 3.6 to 3.1 (actual/projected 1971 - 2010)
- range of 3.0 to 2.5 (projected 2011 - 2020)
- below 2.5 (projected 2021 - 2030)

Data: WI Department Workforce Development for 1999, 4/02 Revisions  
CMS Report On Medicare County Enrollment for July 1st, 1999, 3/00 Update  
The Old-Age and Survivors Insurance (OASI) Trust Fund 2001 Annual Report  
Graph: RWHC 5/08/02 based on an earlier version from the Marshfield Clinic

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## Quality Model From Unlikely Place

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From "Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award 2001 Award Recipient, Education Category: Chugach School District" at: [www.nist.gov/public\\_affairs/chugach.htm](http://www.nist.gov/public_affairs/chugach.htm)

"Chugach School District (CSD) is not your typical school district. It encompasses 22,000 square miles in south central Alaska, including much of the Prince William Sound coastline. Most of its 214 students live in remote areas, accessible only by aircraft. Teachers have to be adept at a variety of subjects, including wilderness and cold water safety and how to respond in the event of a tsunami or an encounter with a bear. District programs span from pre-school to post-secondary education, serving students up to age 21."

"CSD has pioneered a standards-based system of 'whole child education' that emphasizes real-life learning situations. After securing a waiver from the Alaska Department of Education, the district replaced credit hours and grade levels—hallmarks of traditional schooling—with an individualized, student-centered approach. This approach

aims for measurable proficiency in 10 areas of performance, from basic academic and career development skills to cultural awareness and character skills. CSD's high-school graduation requirements exceed Alaska's requirements in many ways."

"Thirty staff members serve the district's widely dispersed student population. Eighteen are based at three community schools. One manages a school-to-work program in Anchorage. The rest are either visiting teachers and specialists who work with home-schooled children or supply education support services. All work with students of various ages, and all teach multiple subjects."

"Though unique in many ways, CSD initiated a grass roots school reform movement that has given rise to successful instructional and organizational methods that schools in other parts of the United States are working to emulate. **CSD is the smallest organization ever to win a Baldrige Award.**"

"*Onward to Excellence*—Since 1994, when it began a comprehensive restructuring effort, CSD has progressed from a school district in crisis to one in which student performance exceeds state and national norms. Schools that once had been the cause of local discontent are now a source of community pride."

"When CSD leaders initiated their 'onward to excellence' process, indicators of student performance were well below state and national averages, with staff turnover exceeding 50 percent. Scores on the California Achievement Test were the lowest in the state, and the average student was reading three grades below grade level. Business leaders complained that graduates were deficient in basic skills, and in 26 years, only one student went on to college."

"From the outset, the district's overhaul was undertaken collaboratively—with CSD staff, current and past students, parents, school board members, and business and community leaders. Stakeholder meetings yielded a core vision, shared values and beliefs, and five categories of organizational performance goals: basic skills, individual needs of students, character development, transition skills, and technology. Throughout, stakeholders emphasized that accountability should be built into the educational system and embedded in CSD's performance goals."

### ***The Rural Economy at a Glance***

Beginning May 2002, the Federal Reserve Bank's Center for the Study of Rural America is providing online monthly summaries of the rural nonfarm and farm economies. The rural nonfarm summaries are a snapshot of changes in rural employment and construction activity. The farm summaries highlight price movements, exports, farm incomes, and more.

[www.kc.frb.org/RuralCenter/RuralMain.htm](http://www.kc.frb.org/RuralCenter/RuralMain.htm)

"*Continuum of Standards*—With the aim of helping students reach their full potential as individuals and as members of their communities, CSD created a continuum of standards for 10 content areas. Demonstrable proficiency in each area—and not the number of credit hours earned—was set as the essential condition for graduation. Once it secured a waiver from the

credit-based graduation requirement, CSD proceeded to implement and refine an innovative standards-based system that has the flexibility to accommodate the learning styles and speeds of all students."

"*Unity of Focus, Commitment*—Although students, faculty, and resources are widely dispersed, CSD has succeeded in achieving a unity of focus among staff and stakeholders. Stakeholder meetings are held quarterly, and surveys to gather community input on CSD performance and goals are conducted annually. Community members regularly attend in-service learning and planning sessions for CSD staff."

"CSD supplements salaries with a pay-for-performance system that rewards individual and district-wide accomplishments. Recognizing the challenging demands that confront faculty in their isolated locations, the district provides for flexible working conditions, allowing arrangements for sharing or rotating jobs and creating a relief team of experienced teachers. The faculty turnover rate, which averaged 55 percent between 1975 and 1994, has fallen to 12 percent."

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## A Cooperative Advantage In Cyberspace

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The goal of the Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative Data Network is for rural hospitals and other providers to achieve a cooperative advantage in the rapidly developing world of electronic transactions as they have historically done through RWHC in traditional arenas. The first phase of the Network is expected to be operational this Summer.

In 2000, RWHC received a targeted consultation grant from the Academy of Health Services Research & Health Policy to study the feasibility of developing a common data network that would allow rural hospitals

to share informational technology (IT) resources, including: infrastructure, hardware, software and expertise. The consultant's conclusion was that there would be immediate and tangible benefits to such a network; an opinion that has been reinforced by other experts who assisted us during the planning stage of the project.

The original impetus for this endeavor stems from the significant challenges rural providers face when trying to implement large-scale, systemic IT projects. These can include cultural, organizational and financial barriers. Rural hospitals agree that if there is one area where collaboration makes sense, it is in the ever-changing arena of information technology. The RWHC Board of Directors identified IT-telecommunications enhancements as their highest priority during their 2002 strategic planning retreat.

By partnering with Norlight Telecommunications ([www.norlight.com](http://www.norlight.com)), an established, regional telecommunications carrier, RWHC will be able to offer rural providers access to a frame relay, Advanced Technology Management network that will feature T1 connections to participating hospitals and clinics, regional providers and the Internet. The Wide Area Network infrastructure permits secure connectivity that will be HIPAA compliant due to redundant firewalls, authentication, security auditing, virus scanning, intrusion detection and filtering mechanisms. Basic services will include: high-speed Internet access, e-mail services, video conferencing streaming, scalable bandwidth, centralized administration and 24 hour, 7 days a week technical support.

Member hospitals have expressed a singular motivation for participation - cost savings through shared business/clinical applications. Examples of applications that surfaced during the 18-month planning phase include: a shared medical library, online verification of benefits eligibility, billing/claims processing, medical dictation/transcription, digitized medical records and image archiving/storage. These applications (and others) will be phased in over time, based on direction from the participants. A pilot group of 6-10 hospitals will determine what will be offered initially. In addition, it is expected that the development of this network will significantly accelerate access to long distance education and remote specialty services.

RWHC has hired a full-time IT manager who will help administer the project, which is targeted for June/July implementation. We are also seeking grant funding to help underwrite the shared connectivity/administration fees of the RWHC Data Network, including extensive dependence on Universal

## RWHC Eye On Health



"This ain't Kansas and the Wizard's long gone."

Service Funding through the Federal Communications Commission.

For more information, contact Larry Clifford, RWHC Director of Product & Member Development at 608-643-2343 or [lclifford@rwhc.com](mailto:lclifford@rwhc.com).

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## Requiem for Hal

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Back by popular request, reflections from RWHC's own Garrison Keillor, Glen Grady, Administrator at the Neillsville Memorial Medical Center:

"I don't go to a lot of movies, but when I was much younger there was this one that I saw while I was in the Army overseas that has stuck in my memory more because one of the characters is the answer to an oft asked trivia question than for its cast or story line. The question: 'What was the name of the computer in 2001: A Space Odyssey?' The answer is of course 'Hal'. Little did I realize when I saw that movie some thirty five or so odd years ago that 2002 was so close, much less that my world would, by that seemingly far off date, come to rely so much on smaller but maybe more powerful versions of Hal."

"Well at about 9:05 AM on April 17, 2002, my own little Hal died—and what follows was my immediate reaction to its death. The initial version was written in long hand because I didn't have a PC much less a word

processing program to put it on at the time, I recreated it here on my new word processing program after a proper period of mourning the old one.”

“I feel lost—like someone very close to me has died. The sense of loss is intellectual, but it is also visceral. It is only data, only information, I keep telling myself. It should be recreatable—(if that’s a word, my little Hal would know and would have told me as I typed this.) But, alas, I don’t have anything backed up. My computer didn’t die a natural death. It was probably homicide. The immediate cause was an unidentified virus sent by some friend that didn’t even know that he had the virus or that he had emailed it to others.”

“It took two days before it totally expired. It was doing ‘funny things’ over that last two days. Sometimes it would freeze up. Sometimes it would not wake up after it went to sleep. Nothing really that unusual, yet noticeable enough that I had run my anti-virus program several times and even defragged the system for the first time ever. But I didn’t back anything up. I really don’t know how to back up very well. I can do it if it fits on a 3 1/2 inch floppy, but if it’s any bigger I have to call Jim—and he has more important things to do (I don’t want to admit to him just how computer illiterate I am).”

“It’s all gone. All the email addresses—I can eventually replace them; and the jokes, they will make their way around again. But the 150 to 200 work related emails that I had either sent or received and that I deemed important enough to save for future reference, many of which I have often referred to, they are gone and irreplaceable. There were the Life Support messages that provided me with a little inspiration and an occasional reality check. Whenever my ego’s north magnetic pole seemed to have moved even farther north, I could go back to those messages and try to get my life’s compass readjusted, back on track.”

“There were also the letters and contracts that I never made ‘hard copies’ of. Why should I? After all, weren’t they safely stored in my computer?”

“And of course my website favorites are gone—mostly government or quasi-government sites that I could check occasionally for new rules and regulations, census and other demographic data on a local, regional or national basis, and quality and utilization information and standards. But for me, the biggest loss of all is my log- my diary.”

“About three and a half years ago I decided to take the first five minutes of every working morning and record the significant events of the previous day or weekend. Just a note based on what was on my mind

that particular morning, what my previous day was like, what I was planning to do that day, and/or my thoughts and feelings about myself and others at that particular moment. I had been pretty faithful in making these notes and had amassed over 290 pages- one day’s entry at a time. Ever since I was a junior in high school I had intended on starting a diary. Miss Sloan, our English Lit. teacher, had suggested that we all start one. She claimed that most people of historical note had kept diaries. I thought about starting one then. But since I didn’t aspire or expect to be a person of any historical significance, I put the idea on the back burner for over 30 years. I had a couple of false starts. But it takes about twenty one days to develop a habit and I was never able to stick with it for over three or four, so I never really got one started.”

“In late 1998, however, I was going through some legal and financial documents that my deceased parents left and I realized that, although my parents were not of any specific note to the rest of the world, their lives were of supreme importance to their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. Oh, how I wished that they had left some daily record of their lives for me to devour.”

“It takes a little arrogance, but only a little, to think that your children will someday care what you were doing or thinking at any particular day of your life. If they don’t want to read it, they can toss it. But if the record never exists, they will never have the opportunity to make that decision.”

“So I had been keeping a diary. On my computer. At work. I justified and continue to justify this on the basis that it was 90% work related and it gave me a reference source that I have used many times when reviewing past operational and personnel decisions. We all know that hindsight is 20/20. The only way I can take myself back to the information base I had and place myself in the particular environment we were operating in at the time we made a strategic decision, was to have an ongoing record in time. I have used it. Many times it has been an invaluable source of information- helping us to avoid make the same mistake twice, as well as allowing us to save the time previously wasted in Monday morning quarterbacking.”

“So I have been keeping a diary but not baking it up very often, then disaster. Then joy.”

“Jim had changed my computers hard drive in January and never erased the old one, so I have only lost about three months of new emails and letters and contracts and favorite websites and most importantly, my diary. In spite of my own sloth, most of these records that are so valuable to me still exist.”

“Still. I feel violated. And by someone who had no reason to assault me. He (or she) has never met me, indeed doesn’t even know that I exist. I am both nameless and faceless to him. He doesn’t know my race, color, gender, creed, ideology, or my position on any controversial issues. He probably doesn’t even know what country I reside in. Whoever this probably very intelligent yet insecure computer hacker is, he apparently gets some perverse pleasure out of casting potential destruction on the waters of the Internet, with no guarantee that he will ever know how much, if any, harm he has done to others. My guess is that he is someone who wants to see the virus he created on the list of dangerous and destructive viruses that the anti-virus companies put on their websites. My more cynical side thinks it could be someone employed by one of these companies who is looking for job security.”

“Whatever. There are at least two lessons I will take from this incident. First of all—back up anything that is important. Daily, if necessary. The time spent backing up vital information may be more important than the time you spent creating it. And secondly, if I ever have an opportunity to serve on a jury in a case involving one of these hackers, I will work to throw the book at him. He has little regard for human kind. And no regard at all for anyone’s children and grandchildren. I’ll bet that, sixty years from now, my grandson Ethan will kind of enjoy reading what his crazy old grandpa was thinking and feeling on the day that his first grandchild was born. It might even leave him with a tear in his eye.”

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## Making Quality Of Care Better

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RWHC is proud to announce that the The Alliance Provider Quality Investment Fund has agreed to fund the initiative, Measuring Local Maternity Outcomes and Developing Capacity for Improvement. A copy of the application is available at:

[www.rwhc.com/papers/Alliance.Grant.2002.pdf](http://www.rwhc.com/papers/Alliance.Grant.2002.pdf)

Hospitals in the Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative are strongly committed to providing high quality maternity care. On behalf of these facilities, RWHC is implementing a project with a focus on labor and delivery in community hospitals. The goal of this project is to have participating hospitals identify specific opportunities for improvement in their local maternity care, i.e. establishing the capacity to move forward with the appropriate interventions.

The three objectives emphasize project planning and QI strategic development. They are: (1) to reach consensus on a common set of maternity care quality measures based on clinical data sets, (2) to determine, through chart reviews, the degree to which each hospital is achieving those measures and (3) to formulate specific QI strategies based on these findings. This approach best matches the purpose of the Alliance grant: “...to increase providers’ capacity to measure and improve care” with known processes for successful quality improvement in rural communities.

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## Learning In And From Aging Americans

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From “It’s Time to Let Wisdom Be a Guide” by Bill Wineke in the *Wisconsin State Journal*, 4/27/02:

“The average age of the women gathered in Chris Barnes’ Virginia Terrace living room last Saturday had to be in the low 80s; in fact, 87 was a number I heard from several of them. Several of them came in leaning on canes. Ears were filled with plastic hearing aids. It was a group of truly elderly women and they had asked me to come speak to them.”

“Before I spoke, however, we enjoyed a nice brunch and I had the opportunity to overhear their conversation. What they were talking about were the relative merits of Turbo Tax versus other computer tax programs. I have to say I was surprised, I’ve never figured out how to figure my taxes on the computer and here were these old ladies debating programs. They also seemed fairly excited about the emails they were exchanging.”

“I had expected them to talk more about aches and pains – and they did seem interested in Sarah’s aches and pains. It seems that Sarah, also 87, had recently been bumped by a dog and toppled backward down a flight of stairs. ‘My doctor told me I was too old for those kinds of acrobatics,’ Sarah, who seemed no worse for wear, explained.”

“One of the stereotypes of our society is that old people are rigid and resistant to change while young people are flexible and willing to try new ideas. I’ve never seen any real evidence that any of that is true—on either side.”

“The young people I know tend to be almost hopelessly conformist—it is no accident that advertisers pay a premium to pitch their wares to the young. The old people I know are almost uniformly willing to embrace new ideas and try new things.”

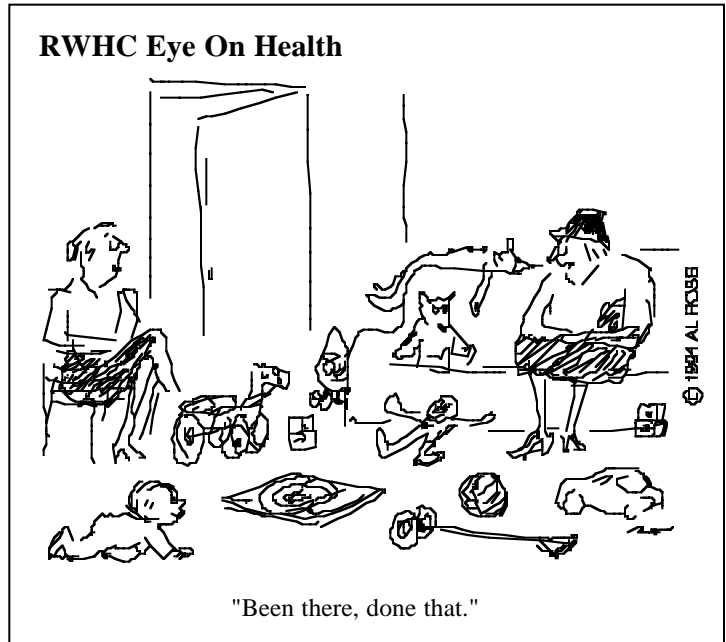
“In part, that’s because they have no choice. If you get old enough, you have to experience change. Your friends get sick and die—but you carry on. Your children get married and divorced—people show up in your family and then leave. At some point, you lose your job and with it, an important part of your identity. At some other point, you leave your home because you can no longer care for it adequately.”

“Old people either become able to roll with the punches or they become absolutely depressed and miserable. Most of the old people I know roll with the punches and most of them are remarkably cheerful.”

“The real sticks-in-the-mud are people like me. I just turned 60 and I have decided most change is likely to be bad. Given my preferences, I would rather never again meet anyone I don’t already know or go anyplace I haven’t already been.”

“Things are going really well in my life right now and I want change to stop. Unfortunately, the only really effective way to stop change in your life is to die and I’m not yet ready for *that*. If I’m lucky enough to keep living I will, sooner or later, retire, adjust my standard of living, lose even more of my eyesight and hearing and say goodbye to beloved friends who weren’t as lucky as I.”

“So, it’s good for me to spend some time around elderly people who have gone through all that and maintain a sense of humor and excitement about life nonetheless. We sometimes think our hope is in the young; I wonder, if, instead, we may find it in the old.”



Space Intentionally Left Blank For Mailing