

**Comments for Public Informational Hearing Regarding Proposed Merger
Between BC NEPA and Highmark**

Steven J. Scheinman, President and Dean

The Commonwealth Medical College

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I am pleased to have this opportunity to comment on the proposed merger between Blue Cross of Northeastern Pennsylvania and Highmark, Incorporated.

The Commonwealth Medical College (TCMC) is a new, fully accredited, independent allopathic medical school that admitted its first students in 2009. TCMC was founded through a grass-roots effort by the community of northeastern Pennsylvania. It is distinguished by the obligation in its mission, explicit and actively pursued by the College, to serve this region and its communities by training physicians who will remain here to practice, and by working with partners in the community to improve health care in the region.

TCMC is proud of the success of our curriculum, which is innovative, community-oriented, and patient-centered, and which emphasizes continuity of clinical experiences. We are particularly proud of the success of our first several classes of students as reflected in a range of measures such as board scores, excellent residency matches, and high quality of performance in residency training. This success is validated by our having received full accreditation from both the LCME and the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

From our founding, and at every critical stage in our development, Blue Cross of Northeastern Pennsylvania has been stalwart in its support of the College. The financial support from BC NEPA has been critical in the launching and the continuing success of the College. And this support has come with no constraints upon my ability as Dean to develop educational initiatives and partnerships with clinical entities and systems throughout the region. Our close relationship with Blue Cross has also made it possible for us to develop initiatives with clinical partners on issues such as coordination of care. No other medical school in the country has such a close relationship with the region's major health carrier, and it has been of great value to the College.

I share the enthusiasm of others who view the proposed merger as a good thing for the customers and for the people of this region. Highmark has the resources and innovative leadership to bring a new level of service and opportunities to this community. I am particularly encouraged by the specific language in the agreement that obligates the merged entity to continue the "historic corporate mission of BCNEPA" in benefit to the 13-county region it has served, and specifically to "... cooperate with The Commonwealth Medical College in endeavors to support the ongoing success of The Commonwealth Medical College ..."

I have had the opportunity to spend time with leaders of Highmark discussing The Commonwealth Medical College and our community-based curriculum and programs. It is clear to me that they appreciate the College's mission, our various initiatives aimed at improving community health, and our focus on replenishing the physician workforce. They have expressed to me their intent to remain engaged in promoting our success.

I am also encouraged that the proposed agreement provides for the establishment of the AllOne Foundation, with substantial assets. While we cannot presume how the resources of this foundation would be used, the agreement is specific in stipulating that they be directed to uses that would benefit the health of the region, and that the board making these decisions will be from this region and members of this community.

Thus, I am excited about the proposed merger and support it as in the best interests of the policyholders, the community of northeastern Pennsylvania, and The Commonwealth Medical College.