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Brackbill, Robert

From: Robert Solomon [rcsmd82@comcast.net]
Sent: Monday, April 08, 2013 7:12 PM
To: Brackbill, Robert
Subject: Proposed Highmark/WPAHS Affiliation

Robert Brackbill
Chief, Company Licensing Division, Insurance Department
1345 Strawberry Square, Harrisburg, PA 17120

April 8, 2013

Dear Mr. Brackbill:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed affiliation between Highmark BC/BS and the West Penn Allegheny Health System.

By way of background, permit me to note that I am a long-time observer of the healthcare environment in southwestern Pennsylvania with a keen interest in health policy and health economics. I went to medical school at the University of Pittsburgh (class of 1982) and did rotations at all of Pittsburgh's teaching hospitals. My post-graduate training was at West Penn Hospital, and I have had persistent ties to UPMC as well, having taught in Advanced Trauma Life Support courses for doctors at UPMC for 16 years (1991-2007).

I have been a leader in my specialty (emergency medicine), having served for six years on the Board of Directors of the American College of Emergency Physicians (2006-2012).

Even as a naive medical student I could tell that the competition between Presby and AGH was not exactly friendly. Over the years since, although it pains me to say this about my alma mater, I have observed that the UPMC story has been one of monopolistic empire building. There have been some decisions made that strain credulity if one tries to find motivation for them based on what is best for the community. The new UPMC East in Monroeville is an excellent example. Given the position of Forbes Regional Hospital as a thriving institution, providing excellent care and steadily expanding services for residents of Pittsburgh's eastern suburbs, it is quite preposterous to say that UPMC East was built to meet a need. I happen to live in the western suburbs, where there is a paucity of hospitals and a burgeoning population, so I have definite views regarding where a new hospital should have been built if UPMC had been looking for an opportunity to meet a need.

From the standpoint of health policy and health economics, I believe it is very clear that this region needs robust competition. The proposed affiliation will create an integrated delivery system of sufficient size and strength to compete with the UPMC system, and I believe that competition will help to improve quality and constrain pricing at the same time. Many of Pittsburgh's community leaders have already voiced similar opinions. Please add my voice to that chorus.

Sincerely yours,

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