

Op Ed

A Fork in the Road for the Health of Cincinnati

Cincinnati faces an important fork in the road: it is time that the participating entities of the Health Alliance put the future of our citizens first and not the coffers of its foundations or even the singular needs of its individual sponsoring hospitals. Great cities are critically dependent upon great Universities, successful academic medical centers, and colleges of medicine.

As evidenced by recent headlines, the Health Alliance is in the midst of an organizational crisis. Reports of hospital withdrawals, CEO departures, board discontent, and heated negotiations appear almost daily. In the middle of these complex business concerns, the mission of the Health Alliance—to optimize health care to Greater Cincinnati—has been lost. Central to this mission is a vibrant University of Cincinnati College of Medicine (COM) and University Hospital, key institutions for the vitality of the Cincinnati metropolitan area. Both stand in jeopardy.

Why should you worry about the Health Alliance conflict? Why care about the COM and University Hospital, especially if you don't receive services from one of the 650 physicians who comprise the COM faculty and UC Physicians? The COM, with University Hospital and other affiliates, has provided our health care safety net for over 190 years. Helicopters fly our injured neighbors to its trauma surgeons; your local doctor refers your friends and family to expert physicians of the COM for complicated illnesses that only the specialists at UC can treat. Unique services such as transplantation and psychiatric emergency services are only available at University Hospital. Most Cincinnati area physicians were and continue to be trained at the COM. Medical scientists of the COM develop and bring the newest medical advances to Cincinnati; innovations that we would otherwise have to travel for hours to access. Finally, the COM, along with its affiliated teaching hospitals, has an economic impact of nearly \$5 billion, is responsible for over 55,000 jobs, and generates over \$150 million in total state tax revenue. It is one of the key economic engines of our entire region. There is no city in the United States that is able to maintain a vibrant, modern, and leading medical center in the absence of a strong college of medicine. Cincinnati is no different.

As practicing physicians, who are chairs of the clinical departments of the College of Medicine—and as Cincinnatians who also get our health care in Health Alliance facilities—we call upon the boards of the Health Alliance, its hospitals, and the University of Cincinnati to stop and take a deep breath. Don't rush into alliances and corporate arrangements driven by political posturing and financial self-interest. Don't put the future health of Cincinnati's citizens at risk by devaluing the UC COM and University Hospital. We ask that our community and state leadership take note and ensure a strong medical presence for Greater Cincinnati by centrally involving the COM and University Hospital in any reshaping of Cincinnati's medical landscape.

Let us build together on the legacy of stewardship and vision that has made Cincinnati a great community.

Signed,

Clinical Chairman for the College of Medicine:

Dr. James Augsburger, Ophthalmology
Dr. William Barrett, Radiation Oncology
Dr. Bradley Britigan, Internal Medicine
Dr. Joseph Broderick, Neurology
Dr. Janette Collins, Radiology
Dr. Michael Edwards, Surgery
Dr. Arthur Evans, OB/GYN
Dr. Brian Gibler, Emergency Medicine
Dr. Mark Goddard, PM&R
Dr. William Hurford, Anesthesia
Dr. Diya Mutasim, Dermatology
Dr. Myles Pensak, Otolaryngology
Dr. Peter Stern, Orthopaedics
Dr. Stephen Strakowski, Psychiatry
Dr. Arnold Strauss, Pediatrics
Dr. David Witte, Pathology
Dr. Mario Zuccarello, Neurosurgery