

Thayer County Health Services –Joyce Beck, CEO

This is an important time in health care reform. While the government looks for ways to cut spending, the Critical Access Hospital (CAH) designation is being threatened. Why is this important to you? Thayer County Health Services and most of the neighboring hospitals are designated CAH's. In fact most rural hospitals in Nebraska are CAH's.

Having the designation of CAH in the United States means the hospital is reimbursed 101% of our expenses by Medicare. This extra 1% is what allows a CAH to have the funds to replace or update medical equipment, update existing facilities or to build a new facility to meet the future needs of patient.

The Joint Committee on Deficit Reduction will make recommendations to reduce government spending by at least \$1.2 trillion over the next 10 years. This committee will consider proposals to reduce payments to CAH's or eliminate the current CAH designation all together. They will consider reducing the payments to CAH's down to 99% of expenses, expanding the miles between CAH's (which will reduce the number of them) or they could vote to eliminate the designation all together. All of these changes would be very detrimental to Thayer County Health Services and the surrounding hospitals. It would mean we would be back to like it was in the 1980's. Some of you probably remember how it was then. Hospitals worried daily about how to keep our doors open. There are two main reasons we should all care about not only Thayer County Health Services but all CAH's throughout Nebraska. This week in my article I will cover the first reason and next week the second reason.

The first reason is the lives we would lose if CAH's no longer existed. Take TCHS as an example. About six years ago my husband woke up on a Sunday morning with chest pain. Within minutes he was at TCHS where he was diagnosed with a heart attack. It was determined he needed to have clot busting medication which was given to him at TCHS to prevent any heart damage before he was taken to Nebraska Heart Hospital in Lincoln. After he was stabilized at TCHS, he was flown to Lincoln where he received quadruple by-pass surgery. It was because of TCHS, Maggie Johnson and Dr. Sullivan that my husband is alive and there is no heart damage. The presence of TCHS and our physicians is why I am able to enjoy his company for many more years. The gift of his life is priceless.

Now let's image the same scenario without TCHS and our physicians in Hebron. My husband wakes up on a Sunday morning with chest pain. Due to the proposed cuts there is no TCHS emergency room, there is no CAH down the road either. There is no one to diagnose the heart attack or give the clot busting medication and therefore we would have to drive to the closest hospital located miles away. It is important for a heart attack patient to receive treatment in 90 minutes from the first onset of symptoms to save their life and prevent heart damage. Without TCHS, the time it would take to travel to a hospital and receive treatment could be in excess of 90 minutes. This delay will cost lives or because 90 minutes is used traveling to an emergency room, there will be heart damage from the heart attack. Even if a live is not lost, the quality of life for that person is.

Our Senators and Representatives are now considering the fate of the rural hospitals and need to hear from us. They need to hear Critical Access Hospitals (CAH's) are important to rural

Nebraska and the designation and reimbursement needs to be continued as is. Let them know having quality healthcare in rural Nebraska is just as important as it is in urban areas. Tell them in Washington about your stories and about the lives saved in rural Nebraska because of CAH's. I urge all of you to take the time to contact the following people immediately:

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500  
[www.whitehouse.gov/administration/president-obama](http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/president-obama)

Congressman Adrian Smith  
Washington, DC Office  
503 Canon HOB  
Washington, DC 20515  
Phone: (202) 225-6435  
Fax: (202) 225-0207  
<http://adriansmith.house.gov>

Senator Ben Nelson  
Washington, D.C.  
720 Hart Senate Office Building  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510  
Tel: 1-202-224-6551  
Fax: 1-202-228-0012  
<http://bennelson.senate.gov>

Senator Mike Johanns  
404 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510  
Tel: (202) 224-4224  
Fax: (202) 228-0436  
Hours: 8:30 a.m. - 6:00 p.m. ET  
<http://johanns.senate.gov>

We can make a difference but the time to act is now before it is too late. For more information on contacting key officials visit our website [www.thayercountyhealth.com](http://www.thayercountyhealth.com).