

Massachusetts Health Professionals Take Aim at For-Profits

by Mara Yerow

A Call to Action from Massachusetts Physicians appeared in the December 3, 1997 issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association. The article is titled For Our Patients, Not Our Profits and is the product of the Ad Hoc Committee to Defend Health Care. Signatures of hundreds of physicians and nurses including those of many highly regarded, nationally known individuals are appended to the commentary.

It is noted that public resources are "being taken over by companies responsive to Wall Street and indifferent to Main Street." While members of the Ad Hoc Committee may differ on health reform, they note five areas of agreement:

- Medicine and nursing must not be diverted from their primary tasks; the relief of suffering, the prevention and treatment of illness, and the promotion of health.
- Pursuit of corporate profit and personal fortune have no place in caregiving.
- Financial incentives which reward overcare or undercare should be prohibited.
- A patient's right to a physician choice must not be curtailed.
- Access to health care must be a right of all.

Of particular interest to health planners is the statement that "the headlong rush to profit-driven care has occurred without the assent of patients or practitioners, through a process largely hidden from public scrutiny and above citizen participation. This must be replaced by an open and inclusive process that is not dominated by the loudest voices - those amplified by money and political influence."

To initiate its campaign, the Ad Hoc Committee held a Boston Tea Party in which they threw reams paperwork now required of providers into Boston Harbor (in an environmentally sound manner). The Tea Party was followed by a forum in historic Faneuil Hall to call public attention to the direction in which health care is heading.

In addition to the initial forum, the Committee has taken several steps to address their concerns;

The Governor, the Legislature and the Attorney General have been petitioned to call a moratorium on for-profit takeovers of hospitals, insurance plans, physician practices, etc.

A series of teach-ins are envisioned throughout the Commonwealth to discuss the health care crisis. All health care institutions have been called upon to devote a conference to the issues.

Public endorsement of the Call to Action has been invited from other professional colleagues and lay groups