

# WARREN VON EHREN

## A RETROSPECTIVE

**T**wenty-six years represents more than a third of the average person's life span. My 26 plus years with the Wisconsin Hospital Association represent about 40 percent of the time the Association has been in existence since its founding in 1920.

During those 26 years, Wisconsin hospitals have gone through numerous changes—many of them traumatic since they impinge on the very existence of some institutions.

If I had a reliable crystal ball it would probably indicate even more drastic changes lie ahead for Wisconsin hospitals in both the short and the long term.

In these brief comments, I can only touch on the many changes that have taken place since 1960—most notably the enactment of the Medicare/Medicaid law in 1965, the rise of health planning beginning in about 1975 and the establishment of the Hospital Rate-Setting Commission in 1983.

Looming ahead are sure to be further initiatives to “control” health care costs and the rise of competition. These efforts will continue to make it more difficult for hospitals to operate and to provide high quality care and equal access to that care.

Through all the changes taking place and likely to arise in the future, I hope Wisconsin hospitals will not lose sight of their primary mission: to provide high quality health care to all who need it, irrespective of the ability to pay.

I am convinced that if hospitals hew to this primary mission, they will gain public support; if hospitals subordinate this mission to other factors, support will not be forthcoming, nor will it be deserved.

This is not to suggest that hospitals shouldn't be competitive or that they shouldn't be concerned about the bot-

tom line. If they disregard either, they probably won't continue to exist anyway.

I am suggesting that competition need not be cut-throat; that hospitals can effectively cooperate with one another, with groups representing consumers, and with units of government at all levels; and that hospitals can achieve a healthy bottom line without compromising their mission and not at the expense of the patient.

I am suggesting that competition and compassion are not antithetical; rather, they can co-exist and thrive.

If I have learned one lesson from my 26 years serving the Association, it is that hospitals will continue to be supported—perhaps even loved and respected—if they remember their primary mission. Holding fast to that principle, hospitals individually and collectively cannot fail; ignoring that premise, they will not, and should not, succeed.

I have enjoyed immensely my 26 years of service with the WHA; they have been good years for me and I hope good ones for the membership. I thank you for the opportunity to serve. I believe the future of Wisconsin hospitals is rosy—although not without some stormy days ahead—and I wish for each of you success in the future.

