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Reflections on 35 years of scrutinizing health care costs, quality [column]

DIANE HESS | SPECIAL TO LNP 3 hrs ago



Diane Hess is executive director of the Central Penn Business Group on Health, an affiliate of the Lancaster Chamber.

For most people, the joy in having a birthday seems to diminish as we age. This is because we know we have a limited lifespan and we don't like seeing the end on the horizon.

For businesses, however, the opposite is true.

As a business matures and survives the test of time, the celebration of its continued existence serves as proof of its ability to successfully navigate the challenges of providing a product or service to the community.

As milestones approach, birthdays also can serve as a time of reflection before continued growth.

The Central Penn Business Group on Health turns 35 this year and as we begin our celebration, it is also time to reflect on what we have accomplished and what we need to do to grow beyond our current position.

The Central Penn Business Group on Health was founded in 1984 as the Lancaster County Business Group on Health by a group of employers concerned about the cost and quality of health care in our community.

Even though costs were low by today's standards, employer concerns about the future led to the development of the only employer-based effort in the region to advocate for the right care in the right setting at the right price.

As the executive director of the Central Penn Business Group on Health, it is my job to ensure we continue to be true to our mission of promoting the continuous improvement in the quality and cost of health care for our member companies, their employees and covered dependents.

Our vision of providing a forum and a voice for all stakeholders in health care ensures we are meeting our goal of adding value for all coalition members regardless of their size.

Today the Central Penn Business Group on Health serves 124 member companies that range in size from four employees to the region's largest employers. Our board of directors includes all of the stakeholders in the provision of employer sponsored health care — employers, providers, carriers and brokers.

Our events have grown in number and attendance as health care continues to dominate the agenda of area employers. And innovation and determination govern our board as we work to help our members understand available tools and approaches for controlling their health care spending while still providing employees with the benefits they need.

The agenda has evolved over 35 years, but remains true to its original intent of giving purchasers an outlet to monitor the quality and costs of employer-sponsored health care.

Initiatives over that time have included data collection and analysis of claims for specific procedures, evaluation and certification of the need for expanded services, advocacy for medical malpractice reform, partnership with the Lancaster Chamber to produce our annual health care benefit survey, creation of our own data analytics solution for employers, development of our own regional data cohort and our push for price transparency.

The Central Penn Business Group on Health will persist in using education as our instrument for change — to inform members about product opportunities and strategies for more cost-effective delivery of care that have had success in other regions of the country.

Additionally, as we share insights from our regional data set, which encompasses over 100,000 lives in our region, we will push for reforms and changes based on what our data tells us.

There is no doubt that fixing health care is a not an easy task. It is a complex problem with tentacles into every aspect of our economy.

At our February networking breakfast, our employer members outlined for us our agenda for the years to come: price transparency for health care services, solutions to make the health care system easier to navigate and, of course, tools to control health care costs.

To some, these may seem like lofty goals. To the Central Penn Business Group on Health, they are our “raison d’etre,” a French phrase meaning “reason for being.”

We thank you in advance for your continued support and look forward to another 35 years of success.

• *Diane Hess is executive director of the Central Penn Business Group on Health, an affiliate of the Lancaster Chamber.*

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