

THE CONCERNED CITIZEN

Exposing the hard truth about Franklin County

CONCERNING ISSUE 3

It's time to heal what ails us

All of us in Franklin County either need health services today or will need it in the future. For our young children and newborns, for our aging parents, for ourselves and for all our relatives, neighbors and loved ones; when illness strikes or an accident occurs, we need to know that the best medical expertise from physicians and practitioners, as well as diagnostic testing is available when we need it most.

Did you know that \$65 million is spent on healthcare for Franklin County citizens each year? That means \$5909 for each of our 11,000-plus citizens. But what do those dollars buy for us? Did you know that nearly 20% of our local population is over age 65? Yet we have not one geriatric specialist available in the area.

www.countyhealthrankings.org tells us that we rank a mediocre 33rd of the 67 Florida counties for health care outcomes. But, that does not tell the story as we also have a high premature death rate. More than 20% of us are in poor or just fair health, although the national figure is just 10%. We rank low in mental health and physical health days. Our newborns suffer from low birth weight numbers well above the national average. Our adult smoking percentage is twice the national average and our excessive drinking rate is nearly three times that national average of 7%. Sexually transmitted diseases are more than four times the national average, as is the teen birthrate. We have almost three times the national single parent household rate and our violent crime rate is more than five times –5x– the national average! Poverty is also more than twice the national average for our children. Our motor vehicle death rate is more than twice the national average. In health 'behaviors,' we rank #56 out of the state's 67 counties. In clinical care, our rank is #55 of 67.

What kind of healthcare do we really need in Franklin County? Because of our small population and lack of public transportation over our large geographic area, physical access to care is logistically challenging. Mental health and dental care is available but is limited.



FRANKLIN COUNTY RANKS 33 OUT OF 67 FOR HEALTHCARE OUTCOMES, ACCORDING TO COUNTYHEATHRATINGS.COM

Vaccine preventable illnesses are three times higher here than state averages. Franklin County women have a 28% higher chance of having a hysterectomy and cervical cancer and fetal death numbers are more than twice the national average.

We need to understand the consequences of our personal choices – as well as the lack of opportunities – which affect our daily lives and increase the costs of healthcare. Medicare reimbursement rates are not rising in line with expenses. Medicaid is the primary insurer for many Franklin County citizens, and self-pay is another large category resulting in financial loss to providers. Health care in the future is trending towards more specialized services in hopes of achieving better outcomes at lower costs. The Affordable Care Act, often referred to “Obamacare,” is expected to make personal coverage available next year, but premium costs, reimbursement rates to providers, out-of-pocket costs and deductibles will continue to make health care an expensive necessity.

The “official” poverty rating tells us that Franklin County citizens are 39% more likely to live in poverty vs. Florida statewide statistics. Being poor is not necessarily a reflection of intelligence, character or desire to stay healthy, but we often see the lack of choice or opportunities

contributing to the health care challenges we face. Sometimes, illness results from our own unhealthy choices such as smoking, alcoholism, drug use, criminality and lack of education. In addition, anti-societal influences and a breakdown in family structures all play their part in the local medical picture that sickens far too many of us.

Building a new hospital in Apalachicola may seem desirable, but the reality of our demographics must be understood first. This facilities issue is a vital question that must be faced as part of a health care debate. A recent newspaper letter talked about building a bigger hospital to provide more services. In reality, our service area is too small for a state-of-the-art cancer or cardio or obstetrics unit, neonatal care, diagnostic imaging, dialysis or the many other specialized services expected by patients today. No new hospital building will change that. Although Weems Hospital is managed by a caring staff and Board, final oversight of tax monies spent there is the responsibility of our County Commissioners.

Who will make sure Franklin County is getting everyone's money's worth tomorrow? And, what do you believe is the direction Franklin County health care should take for the next generation of local patients? Call or write us with your ideas, concerns or comments.

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