



Opinion Editorial

For further information:

Contact - Cindy Samuelson
(785) 233-7436; (785) 249-1727
csamuelson@kha-net.org

Is Kansas Doing All It Can To Preserve Access to Health Care?

By Tom Bell, President and CEO, Kansas Hospital Association

(Sept. 23, 2015) There has been significant coverage of the unfortunate situation in Independence, Kansas, and the hospital closure facing Mercy Hospital Independence. Anyone who has been following the situation knows how hard the community of Independence, and really people all over Southeast Kansas, are working to maintain access to health care in that community. Numerous options have been explored, and countless volunteer hours have been expended in this effort.

While these local efforts are a tribute to the determination and community spirit of Kansas citizens, it is natural to ask whether the State of Kansas could play a more positive role. Many have wondered if the future of Mercy Hospital Independence might look brighter had Kansas had been one of the many states choosing to take advantage of Medicaid expansion. That is an entirely appropriate question since Kansas has officially ignored this opportunity, even in the face of growing evidence that it is working in other states. According to the State's own numbers, Medicaid expansion would have had an annualized impact of \$1.6 million in additional revenue to Mercy Hospital Independence. While no one knows whether this one factor would have been enough, it would have at the very least been a significant factor in the discussions.

When Washington doesn't understand, and Topeka doesn't listen, it lands on the shoulders of local citizens to use whatever resources they can to solve the problem. Those local citizens will inevitably do just that because health care is so important as an economic anchor; as a contributor to a community's quality of life; and most importantly, because having access to health care locally affects the well-being of individuals. The people of Independence and Southeast Kansas are clearly going to bat to preserve access to health care. Can we say the same thing for the State of Kansas?

Tom Bell is the president and CEO of the Kansas Hospital Association in Topeka, Kansas. KHA is a not-for-profit association of health care provider organizations and individuals that are committed to the health improvement of their communities. KHA membership includes 214 member facilities, of which 127 are full-service community hospitals. Founded in 1910, KHA maintains its vision of “an organization of hospitals working together to improve access, quality and the affordability of health care for all Kansans.”

###