

guest opinion

by Winona Health CEO Rachele Schultz

What's next?

Back to business, sort of. As we gain some breathing space from the onset of COVID-19 to resumption of services to our community, we are also very actively establishing new processes that position us for a surge, a second wave, a new vaccine, or any new infectious disease that may show up. This experience has taught us a lot and we are putting it to good use. Further, COVID has disrupted health care in a manner that allows for deep and long-lasting change to a system that was in a rut. Some have parsed this experience into three phases: respond, recover and reimagine. I like these phases.

We responded, and we continue to do so. Our plans were developed and executed, and elements lie in wait in the event they are needed. For example, we have approval to expand the number of licensed hospital beds if a surge occurs, and we have sufficient resources to outfit that expansion. Ongoing testing, screening, and overall surveillance are also core to this work. Testing in our regional congregate living residences is almost complete and expanded community testing is underway. To date (May 18), there have been very few positive cases in our service area. That is both good news, and cautionary information. It does not mean the threat of COVID is over; rather one conclusion may be that Winonans answered the call to maintain social distancing, wore masks, and practiced hand hygiene and other infection-prevention actions. This is great news; however, it also means Winonans cannot let up on these practices lest we begin to experience outbreaks.

We are now in the recovery phase. As you are likely aware, Winona Health has resumed full clinic hours, elective procedures, and elective surgeries over the past two weeks. Even so, we are taking a measured approach to this recovery to ensure patients and our health care staff remain protected and safe from exposure to COVID. Processes we may have thought were temporary have now found their way into our daily work. A primary example is screening all individuals (patients, staff and visitors) who come into our buildings. This screening includes temperature taking. Our approach to this included consideration for patient needs, our around-the-clock operations (e.g. physicians and staff on call after hours for emergency surgery), and continued separation between patients presenting with and without COVID symptoms. Our recovery plan is extensive as we address how we resume all normal operations while at the same time ensuring we can flex and accommodate COVID situations. This means we monitor our PPE

supplies, testing, screening, inpatient ICU and medical/surgical bed capacity and unit separation, and more, so that we can adjust if needed.

You may think the reimagined phase is yet to come; however, it is running simultaneously with the other two phases. This is no time to wait and see if things settle down. While the pandemic tested and stressed many processes, it also opened new doors to how we deliver care. For example, telemedicine has been available for a number of years but regulatory barriers limited its use. The telemedicine genie is out of the bottle. The elimination of those barriers and the rapid adoption of telemedicine has proven to be a game changer. It will not entirely replace visits to one's provider, but it will enhance and complement care provided to patients. That is but one example of health care reimagined. A key strategic focus at Winona Health is population health or value-based programs. Essentially, our focus is on collaborating with patients to advance their health and well-being. We have been very successful in this work and are expanding it. The major measures of success are lower health care costs, high-quality outcomes and improved patient experience and access. Our work aligns the needs of patients, providers and payers.

As I reflect on some of the lessons learned from the pandemic, it is clear that one's health status is a critical element in the outcome of contracting such a disease. Studies are showing that high blood pressure, obesity, age, any respiratory conditions, immunosuppression, and other chronic conditions play a significant role in the course of the illness and its outcome. I know there is a lot more we will learn as more studies are done. In the meantime, I am grateful that Winona Health's transformation work was well underway and focused on chronic conditions, health promotion, well-being, and early intervention. We do not want to wait for the next novel virus or disease to show up and wreak havoc on our community. Our preparation includes moving the dial on the health of our community, reflecting our mission, and we do that in partnership with all of you. Be well.



letters

Great Dakota Gathering cancelled; board looks to future

From: Brian Mueller
WDUA Board president

The board of the Winona Dakota Unity Alliance has made the difficult decision to cancel the 2020 Great Dakota Gathering and Wacipi.

In challenging times, we cling to community. We have been blessed with supportive communities that are willing to come together in a spirit of sharing and celebration. That is why the decision to cancel the Gathering was so difficult for the board. We have a responsibility to consider the safety of the communities we serve, and it is that responsibility that guided our decision. We consulted with our Native elders, and they advised us to do what was safest and in the best interest of all involved.

We view this as an opportunity to strengthen our organization, to develop deeper connections, to broaden what we offer, to reorganize and more effectively communicate with everyone involved, and to build a sustainable legacy.

We will need your help to move forward. If you have an interest in our mission, or an interest in helping the WDUA thrive, please consider becoming a volunteer, or consider joining our board. It is an opportunity to use your energy in a way that will have a positive effect for many years to come.

Pidamaya for your continued support!

Please reconsider Cedar Brook Co-op

From: Marilyn Ezdon
Dakota

I would like the Winona City Council to reconsider its denial at its May meeting for the Cedar Brook Sr. Co-op building in Pleasant Valley. With 41 reservations for a 36-unit building, it is obvious there is a need for owner-occupied housing for senior adults. On the positive side, I have heard that Wilson Township and Winona are continuing talks to reach an Orderly Annexation Agreement (OAA) for County Road 17. Bradford Development is working on building modifications and a better visual to show how the co-op will fit at the back of this Pleasant Valley coulee. There currently are three houses along County Road 17 in front of the three-acre lot as well as an additional 250-foot buffer space between the County Road houses and the co-op's building lot. The buffer will eventually hold more family housing. I do not think this building will detract anyone's view being it is at the base of the bluff behind houses. I am hoping for agreement from the city of Winona on this project soon, so Bradford Development does not have to move to Plan B, which may not include Winona. Bradford, who built the successful Willow Brook Co-op in Winona, began this project idea two years ago. The land was chosen one year ago.

Winona and Wilson Township — please help make this happen soon.

Winona needs affordable, co-op senior housing

From: Leslie Foote
Winona

I'd like to encourage the city of Winona to work with Bradford Development (proposed Cedar Brook Co.) or some other developer to pursue building affordable, senior cooperative housing in the area behind the movie theater.

I know that there have been suggestions of building a hotel there but I think residential, owner-occupied housing would be a better fit.

There is obviously a need and desire for this type of housing. All of the units for the proposed Cedar Brook development were already spoken for and additional people were on a wait list before the development had even received city approval (which it did not).

Based on the success of Willow Brook and the long wait list they have there, it seems obvious to me that Winona needs affordable, senior housing built on a cooperative model. Building it downtown would afford residents the opportunity to walk to shops, restaurants and arts events without having to drive everywhere.

I urge people who were hoping to have the Cedar Brook development approved, to contact their City Council member and encourage them to pursue this type of development in downtown Winona.

letters

On scapegoats and coronavirus

From: Doug Nopar
Winona

"Immigrants provide labor when we need labor and scapegoats when we need scapegoats." So says my friend, "Rochester Phil."

The coronavirus is certainly unprecedented in our lifetimes, at least in its ability to afflict public health and our economy. What is not new, however, is who we choose to blame for our pain — the foreigner and the

immigrant. The immigrant-blaming comments I am already hearing, and the reports filed by the Asian-American community with the Minnesota Department of Human Rights are certainly disturbing.

As a longtime, rural Winona County resident, I know we're better than that. I say thanks to the Hmong farmers at the market, the Mexican neighbor that serves up the best quesadillas, the members of the Shared Ground Latino farming cooper-

ative beginning their own farming enterprises, and so many more wonderful stories of entrepreneurship and contributions to our food and farming culture in rural Minnesota.

Can coronavirus make us see that we really are all in this together, no matter where we come from? It's a choice we face: Do we pour hot fuel on what divides us, or do we build a bridge of humanity? Let's choose the latter.

Will the future include less economic disparity?

From: Rachel Eliason
Winona

I saw someone on TV the other day commenting that the "new normal" needs to be one where there is less economic disparity. Of course, many people have been saying this for years. These days the adage "The rich get richer and the poor get poorer" seems more like a governing principle or a governmental mantra regardless of which party you're talking about.

I have given up on our government, but I have not given up on the American people. I think that, unfortunately, we cannot rely upon the government to save us or even to tell us the truth at least half the time. Watching CNN or Fox News is not going to help anyone except those hell bent upon dividing us which is the best way to make us weak, hateful, intolerant, miserable, and paranoid (Nazi Germany anyone?).

Our strength is in our unity and in our goodness, in doing what is right. It is by happenstance that some people are born

into financially secure, loving, caring, law-abiding families while others are born into poverty, substance addiction, physical abuse, sexual abuse, or criminal activity. Don't think for one minute that you could never have been born already addicted to heroin or to parents too busy getting high to meet your basic needs or to parents who know nothing about love or how to raise children with kindness, empathy, compassion, and respect. Childhood abuse, neglect, and trauma make us who we are as adults. These are realities no one likes to face but they must be faced before we can change our culture and replace evil with love and goodness.

Since we all need money to live, why don't we do the right thing and pay everyone a living wage? There is too much disparity between what minimum wage/near minimum wage workers make and those at the upper end of the pay scale make. I know that many people consider fast food jobs not "real jobs" and just a way for teenagers

to make spending money. This is absurd. A job is a job. Jobs exist to meet a need in society. If there were no need, there would be no job. People like to eat fast food and rely upon it to feed themselves and their family. That makes fast food workers very valuable. Maybe we could start showing equal respect to all people who have jobs instead of trying to make some people feel inferior.

In my opinion, there are only two ways to fix the income inequity problem. One is to reduce the wages of those at the upper end of the pay scale and distribute it to those at the lower end. The other is for businesses to accept less profit by increasing wages at the low end. I'm no economic genius, but how else can it be done? Please tell me by posting in the comments section online.

America doesn't need to be the best. We just need to be a nation that demonstrates equality, fairness, respect for everyone, and goodness by doing what is right. Thank you.

Who is on my ballot this fall?

From: Jennifer Mulyck
Goodview

Who is on my ballot this fall? Is this something you can obtain relatively soon for constituents? I want to personally vet these candidates for all offices more thoroughly than I have in the past. I also want to know who is running unopposed, as maybe there are people who feel they could come forward this year and aid our community as a public servant.

I have not been diligent in past years. I feel this is a failure on my part and am eating humble pie, because of my lack of con-

trol and arming myself with much-needed knowledge. I have the time now. I may as well use it wisely. Moreover, it is not only my right, but my duty to the city, county, state and nation.

Minnesota appears to be performing much better than other states, and I would urge every citizen of voting age to first, vet the source of any information. Second, look at multiple, credible sources. And finally, meet with the candidate, if possible. Perhaps even a phone conversation would be sufficient or an email.

I would also add, if you don't like the pol-

itics of your party or that of another party, then you need to go to the party headquarters and discuss changes you would like to see. I would guess we have a lot more in common than social media, mainstream media or some government officials would have us believe.

This discourse can and must be done civilly. Grandma always said, "You can catch more flies with honey." They are people too. We are all in this together and it is pretty evident now. Let us, together, make the necessary course correction, if there needs to be one.



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