

**Question 1 threatens county health initiatives** - Berkshire Eagle – September 21, 2018

To the editor:

On Nov. 6, I will be voting "No," without reservation, on ballot Question 1.

Over the last 30 years I have held many positions and served in many clinical areas within Berkshire Health System and in our community. I have tremendous respect and admiration for our nurses and all our health care personnel. One should not conflate opposition to this ballot initiative with failure to support our nurses or safe care in our hospitals. While there is an abundance of conflicted opinion on the economic and care delivery implications of this initiative, I choose to focus on the potential impact of community-based care and population health initiatives here in the Berkshires.

Virtually all disease and disease risk are influenced by our behaviors and lifestyle choices. It is widely accepted that as much as 75 percent of what determines how long and how well we live can be traced to the choices we make in our lives and the quality of the environments that we live in. The greatest drivers of lifestyle behaviors and environment are the social determinants of health e.g., socioeconomic, food security, transportation, supportive connection to others, education, and safe housing.

As BHS's director of population health, I collaborate with many stakeholders to create conditions that help others realize what is possible in their lives. Developing social capital through clinical-community integration is where the rubber meets the road in our efforts to help others choose more wisely and to transform "diseases of despair" into hope and possibility.

To that end, healthy living does not happen in hospitals. In fact, based on research from The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and from the University of Wisconsin, hospital care, as important as it is, contributes to only 20 percent of longevity and quality of life in any community it serves.

Based on the 2018 RWJ County Health Rankings, Berkshire County ranks near the bottom in Massachusetts from a health perspective in large part because of our unique and challenging social determinants. We confront ongoing economic challenges, educational needs, food insecurity (20 percent of children in the county are uncertain when and what their next meal will be), lower median household income, transportation infrastructure needs, housing needs, an aging demographic and a silent epidemic of social isolation.

The accelerated change of our health care environment requires shifting far more precious resources away from our hospitals and into our communities to support workforce needs: e.g. community health workers, clinical social workers, health coach-educators, and navigation-care coordination systems and more innovative models of care delivery. We need to meet people where they are at and empower them to be more effective stewards of self-efficacy. Question 1 reflects little, if any, perspective on the global health care challenges we confront in the Berkshires and in the state. These implications are far too complex to be addressed as a ballot question. A 'Yes' vote on Question 1 will divert much needed precious resources away from where the future of care for us and the generations to follow needs to be focused.

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