

## **Health First Network: 2007 Reflections**

By Robin Herr, President & CEO

As we embark on 2008, it is again time to reflect on the events of the past year. Perhaps the most notable of these was the absence of a relationship with Blue Cross Blue Shield of Florida. Although we terminated our contract in 2006, 2007 marked the first year in our history operating without any revenue from this provider. Initially, some physicians and practice managers were concerned this void would affect our viability; however, thanks to the foresight of the board, Health First Network did just fine last year.

Here are a few examples of our success:

In late 2006, we increased our WellCare rolls throughout the year with the addition of two new dual eligible Medicare/Medicaid products. We completed an audit of primary care diagnosis codes for WellCare members and with it have succeeded in assuring increased revenues for both Health First Network and our primary care physicians as we enter 2008.

Nearing 2007, we also began using predictive modeling as a management tool. As we gained experience using it, we significantly increased the number of WellCare and Health Ease members in case management. As a result, we reduced WellCare hospital admissions by more than 10 percent. We expect similar results for Health Ease. As we continue to capitalize on this productive tool, we are sure to discover even greater opportunities for successfully managing these populations.

Dr. William Whibbs joined Health First Network full time in August, and has already impacted the organization positively and profoundly. In his new role, he has more time to spend with network physicians, various local and state health departments, and case management staff. This has resulted in the identification of many more opportunities to affect better health care outcomes for health plan members.

In November, we finalized the formation of a new, joint-venture company with Physician Care Network, an IPA located in the Florida Big Bend area. The first major focus of this new company will be to contract for the delivery of Medicaid to a potential membership of more than 30,000 individuals in a 10 county area in and around Gainesville.

Furthermore, as we go to press, we are finalizing plans to introduce a new pre-paid primary care product in Escambia and Santa Rosa Counties. This product is designed to service the needs of uninsured and underinsured working families. State licensing issues remain and need to be resolved, and our board of directors must yet give final approval, but we anticipate rolling out this product before summer 2008.

Thanks to our joint marketing efforts with WellCare, we have added and expect to continue adding a substantial number of new Medicare members to our rolls. The addition of new primary care physicians from West Florida and Sacred Heart Hospitals and agreements from physicians in the northern end of Escambia and Santa Rosa Counties to participate in this product also increased membership.

As for the Health First Network's reputation, two anchor events continued to position us as leaders among the community. In March, we co-sponsored a series of anti-tobacco rallies for Escambia and Santa Rosa County high school students and Pensacola Naval Air Station student sailors. Then, in April, we collaborated with local author John Appleyard, the Escambia School

System, and Escambia Health Departments to produce a text/coloring book about good health, which we then gave to all fourth grade students.

Health First Network also sponsored an education seminar for physicians in partnership with the Medical Education Councils of Pensacola (MECOP). This event focused on “Managing Pain” and was held at the new Andrews Institute, drawing more than 60 physicians and health care professionals.

As part of our ongoing efforts to serve as a resource to practices, we have retooled our newsletter *Connect*, which is now sent via e-mail to nearly 600 recipients. In our most recent survey, 80 percent of respondents said they read *Connect*. We have also upgraded our web site, adding many new features designed to provide enhanced service to network members.

Finally, we leveraged our purchasing power to provide two new opportunities for cost savings to physician practices by signing contracts with Gulf Coast Office Products and Clearwave (a kiosk based patient registration and eligibility verification tool).

As we look ahead, we hope to build on the many activities initiated in 2007. We are eager to find a Medicaid partner for our new joint-venture company and to complete the necessary legwork to introduce our pre-paid health product. We also want to continue using predictive modeling as we increase case management and to strengthen our relationships with community and business leaders as we look to additional business opportunities.

Dr. Whibbs, on his front, will investigate how we can best support the physician community as new requirements for e-prescribing and pay-for-performance are mandated by state and federal governments.

This year, we will also strive to build a strong relationship with Coventry Health, formerly Vista. The company has expressed an interest in growing its presence in the market, and we are currently working together to uncover mutually beneficial possibilities.

Above all, we hope to continuously find ways to improve our services to our network of physicians and their supporting staffs. We believe there is true value in local medical managements and that is significantly impacts the cost and quality of health care delivery. We desire to exploit the advantages in the interest of our physicians and their patients.

We wish every one the very best in the New Year.