Chapter 9

All of the caregiving professions recognize that not getting sick is better than getting sick and getting well. Any healthcare professional has the obligation to understand the limits of cure and the opportunities of prevention. This means at least tacitly recognizing the inevitability of death. The chapter is about how some excellent HCOs and HCO managers deal with those realities.

It turns out that there are two successful strategies at present. One, which WMHO 7 calls “excellence in care,” limits or at least strongly focuses its activities to curative medicine. The other, which WMHO 7 calls “community health,” strives to provide excellent care, expand prevention, and improve comfort for patients and families when death is in sight.

One could consider the difference as though community health were a service line, like women’s health or renal disease. It’s in addition to excellence, not instead of excellence. That’s a start, but it understates the distinction. Women’s health and renal disease clearly fit the prevailing business model—patients and insurers will pay for specific interventions that are usually curative, and the more extensive the intervention, the higher the price they will pay. Community health explicitly contradicts that business model. It teaches healthy people to avoid illness and disability, and suggests that palliative care is more appropriate than speculative and expensive treatment when the end of life is in sight. It systematically reduces the cost of insurance and the income to the acute care hospital and several medical specialties.

Note that, although the mission changes, the other elements of the HCO’s foundation do not. Empowerment and responsive listening remain in place. Service excellence is strengthened. Evidence will still drive decisions. Continuous improvement—OFIs plus Identify, Analyze, Test, Evaluate—still prevails. In fact, one HCO activity becomes teaching those foundations to others in the community, through the alliances that drive community health.

The authors believe the shift to community health is inevitable and that all management professionals should understand what’s involved. The milestone questions give you the cognitive foundation. The questions for discussion lead you through some of the decisions involved. The five in the text are a nice progression through common issues managers must face. The additional questions for discussion delve into some of the cognitive issues, where understanding helps managers dialogue with various stakeholders.