

# OPIN

## The future of health care

### People have chance to help shape policy

Every now and then the experts announce some new policy based on research into what "the people" want, and quite a few of "the people" wonder who the heck the experts talked to, because the new policy isn't what they'd like at all. That's why residents of Genesee, Wyoming and Orleans counties should be jumping at the chance to participate in the "Reaching for Excellence" program of the Community Health Foundation of Western and Central New York.

The CHF has put together different scenarios of what future health care could look like under four sets of policies, and wants people to tell them which scenarios would best serve their needs. The foundation, which covers the eight Western New York counties and eight counties around Syracuse, can then advocate for real people who expressed real opinions and concerns. Armed with "user" input, the foundation can work with health care providers and elected officials to shape policies for health care that work in reality, not just in theory.

But people first have to see the presentations. That's not an onerous task, since each is only about 4½ minutes long. The foundation will bring the program to most any group — clubs, churches and other organizations — that invites

them, free of charge. Someone from the organization will make the presentation and then encourage discussion about what audience members like and dislike about each scenario. All the host club needs to do is provide the place and the audience. The foundation hopes to get a wide range of groups so a wide range of "user" opinions can be gathered.

Genesee County Office for the Aging will be hosting at least one such meeting. Director Pamela Whitmore said older adults are the largest segment of the health care population and their needs in rural areas are a concern. The foundation hopes service clubs also sign up to host presentations. The more presentations made to various groups, the better.

If you belong to a club or group, you might want to contact your president or program chairman and suggest he or she contact the foundation. The telephone number is (716) 852-3030. It's a chance to help create workable public policy rather than hoping elected officials guess right. There are no guarantees that all of people's preferences would turn up in future health care policies, but there is one guarantee — if people don't speak up, their preferences won't even be considered.