Publisher's Letter

As Health Affairs moves into its fifteenth year of publication, now seems like a reasonable time to take account of our place in the evolution of America's pluralistic health care system. Health Affairs was launched in 1981 based on my firm conviction that an information void existed between the reports published in daily newspapers and aired on radio and television and the more arcane research contained in academic journals. Every discipline, be it economics, medicine, political science, or sociology, had professional journals to which its members submitted most of their work. But, at the time (1981), no organization was publishing a periodical that sought to bridge these professional boundaries and offer material of great interest to any serious-minded person who wanted to learn more about the health care system. Based on this opinion, we launched Health Affairs. Initially, many authors with academic appointments were skeptical that a journal dominated by the liberal arts could be rigorous enough to be a credible periodical. But from the beginning we underscored the importance of external peer review as the arbiter of what we published. Now, authors advocate Health Affairs for what it is—a serious quarterly journal that reaches beyond any particular discipline to inform readers about America's dynamic, but chaotic, system of delivering and financing health care. Our new challenge is to identify better ways to explain the profound systemic changes that are now occurring, driven largely by nongovernmental decision making. Fortunately, a number of private foundations, recognizing the public-spirited goal of Project HOPE's journal, have provided critical support to sustain Health Affairs. Our key benefactors have been The California Wellness Foundation, The Commonwealth Fund, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, and The Pew Charitable Trusts. The MacArthur Foundation has been a particularly important partner in supporting the publication of illuminating material on mental health services and the care of vulnerable populations afflicted with mental illness, such as is contained in this thematic issue.

William B. Walsh, M.D., Publisher