

My Turn

Cartoon mischaracterized what 'critical access' designation for Holy Cross would mean

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Fake news has invaded the Taos paper in the recent political cartoon about the critical access designation for Holy Cross Hospital. I'm extremely disappointed in the cartoon's total mischaracterization and appalled that *The Taos News* would print such a demonstrably false cartoon without checking facts. I suppose that's what happens when people do not obtain their information from credible sources but instead rely on hysteria and hearsay.

A person is not simply kicked out of the hospital and devoid of treatment after 96 hours as the cartoon portrays. The cartoon may seem funny but it is disparaging to the efforts of everyone at Holy Cross and the concern that exists to provide the best possible treatment for the people of Taos County.

The most important thing to know is that the critical access designation isn't actually changing anything about how patients are currently cared for at the hospital. The designation simply allows Holy Cross to be eligible for greater federal reimbursement; and yes, there are certain requirements to satisfy which seems to be causing the confusion, but they aren't that complicated to understand and the new situation will improve the financial viability of the hospital. Critical access is working in 1,300 hospitals in communities like Taos.

The two primary issues are the 96-hour length of stay rule and the 20 percent copayment requirement.

The average length of stay for all patients at Holy Cross is fewer than 96 hours, so that means that patients are either sufficiently treated or transferred for additional care. If a patient needs more than 96 hours in the hospital, then that patient is transferred out of Holy Cross to an acute care hospital, is going to rehab or being discharged with Medicare benefits intact.

The 20 percent copayment requirement only applies to Medicare outpatient services. The monetary aspects of this seem to be scaring people, but the hospital is working on financial measures for those without supplemental insurance so that neither the patient nor the hospital is saddled with bad debt.

The hospital has gone to great lengths to explain critical access through numerous public meetings throughout the county. Anyone who has attended those meetings and understood how critical access works could not possibly perceive critical access as depicted in the cartoon. Two recent "My Turn" contributors also had misunderstandings.

If critical access does not work for Holy Cross and the Taos community, which is unlikely, it can be cancelled. In most respects, Holy Cross is already functioning as a critical access hospital except without the reimbursement advantages. Every day of delay costs dollars.

For more complete information, please visit the Holy Cross Hospital home page at taoshospital.org and click "Critical Access Forums" on the sidebar to the left. From there, click on "View the pdf presentation here" in the middle in bright blue for an easy to read and well-stated explanation.

Kamprath is a resident of Taos.

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