

# Health delivery system is our immediate need



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Sometimes the challenges we face in life can seem overwhelming. I recall a childhood teaching I learned, that the Creator will never burden you with more than you can handle. I keep reminding myself of that lesson as my husband Richard, faces the 27th day

of a battle for his life. Surgical complications from a relatively routine procedure have resulted in three near death incidents and four subsequent surgeries in a matter of 15 days.

I'm reluctant to use this space to shine a light on my family's own personal problems, but we've received so many calls and inquiries from tribal members who know my Richard (and those who don't know him), that I wanted to take this opportunity to update and to thank everyone for your prayers, your pipes, semah, your words of encouragement, cards and acts of kindness. It's been a test of the depths of personal endurance. It would be an insurmountable challenge without the support of community. And I thank the Creator for the gift of your support.

I'm also very grateful for the

great health insurance I have. As a retired federal employee, I have (FEHB) Federal Employee Health Benefits. I don't utilize the health insurance benefit offered to me by the tribe. But I do use our tribal health clinics, and they are then able to bill my insurance and utilize the revenue for operational purposes.

As I sit here at William Beaumont Hospital in Troy, Mich., I constantly think about all our tribal members access to quality health care. How many of our tribal members have no health insurance coverage; how many rely solely on our own Sault Tribe health system; how many refuse to enroll for Medicaid or even Medicare under the misguided idea that the federal government gives our tribe sufficient funds to adequately meet the healthcare

needs of our citizens; how many have no access to our health system because they live too far away; and most importantly, I'm concerned about the adequacy and quality of health care we are able to deliver. These things weigh heavy on my mind.

I admit I was cynically amused by a bucket list of "priorities" a new board member recently presented for immediate action. No mention therein of health care! We are a tribe with 40,000 members, 80 percent of whom live in the state of Michigan. We have an opportunity to profoundly expand the access and availability of health services to our tribal members who reside in the state of Michigan under the provisions of Indian Health Care Improvement Act under the larger Affordable Care Act.

An ambitious effort to ramp up, devote resources and drive this opportunity to reality should be our No. 1 priority! Because it won't be accomplished for us. Without bold leadership at the board level, our health delivery system will be unable to broaden it's scope to bring quality health care to all our members, regardless of where they live in Michigan. I recognize that it's an overwhelming task. It will be a test of the depth of our leadership. But it's not an insurmountable challenge, especially if the chairman makes it his No. 1 priority. And with the support of our tribal community and the board, it can become a reality.

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