

New board has will and skill to rescue Jackson Health System

BY MARCOS LAPCIUC

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The financial challenges of Jackson Health System, and safety-net health systems throughout the nation, have been widely publicized recently, causing great concern. And rightly so.

It is no secret that Miami-Dade's only public health system and main teaching hospital is facing existential challenges. Inarguably, Jackson's failure would be a financial, moral and social disaster that would devastate the health of our community.

Yet, despite these enormous economic hardships, Jackson is at the top of its game medically. The quality of healthcare at all Jackson facilities has never been better. The proof is clear: U.S. News & World Report recently ranked UM/Jackson the No. 1 hospital in South Florida and Holtz Children's Hospital among the nation's best pediatric care hospitals.

As Jackson undergoes a period of great transformation, which includes a new board structure and new management team, the health system will maintain the high quality, single standard of care the community has grown to expect. The changes necessary for Jackson's survival began with initiatives implemented by the previous administration and the Public Health Trust and are continuing at a more rapid pace under the new board and leadership of president and CEO **Carlos A. Migoya**. He is a forward thinker with the financial acumen Jackson desperately needs at this critical time. He is surrounding himself with a highly talented group of people whose purpose is to make Jackson the most successful public teaching hospital in the nation.

The new Financial Recovery Board has a clear mission — to make financial sustainability at Jackson a top policy priority. This board will stay focused, think creatively and move quickly and decisively. Indecision, bureaucracy and personal interests could keep Jackson in the abyss. So much is at stake, and we all know for certain that we will lose by not taking decisive and immediate action.

During its initial meeting, the Financial Recovery Board instituted several policy directives. As a board, we will:

- Continue to seek and demand full transparency and accountability at all levels of operations.
- Maintain a partnership with the Board of County Commissioners, under the leadership of Chairman Joe Martinez, to tackle difficult issues.
- Focus on Jackson's financial challenges and viable immediate and long-term solutions.
- Enhance our cooperation with the new Miami-Dade mayor to ensure that we share the same vision for Jackson.

- Enter into fair and serious negotiations with our labor partners on contracts, and our academic partners, the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine and FIU Herbert Wertheim College of Medicine, on our annual operating agreements.

The success of Jackson's outpatient strategy will largely depend on the relationship with its two academic partners. As we move towards healthcare reform, there will be an increased demand for primary care physicians — and Jackson is equipped to train these future doctors and lay the groundwork for them to maintain their relationship with the system.

Working in collaboration with Miami-Dade's Office of Countywide Healthcare Planning and Federally Qualified Health Centers throughout our community, Jackson must place an emphasis on preventative and primary care, as well as establishing the concept of medical homes. These efforts will not only improve the overall health of our community, but will undoubtedly help Jackson lower operational costs and cut down on the number of cases in the emergency room, thereby increasing revenue. It is a win-win situation.

Jackson is in the midst of reinventing itself. It will take time. But the process has already begun.

I ask that the residents of Miami-Dade County think about how important Jackson Health System is to the overall health of our community. After all, you are the true owners of Jackson and the clients we serve.

Remember that for more than 90 years, Jackson has been the hospital that welcomes everybody in Miami-Dade County — regardless of race or socioeconomic status. Patients are never asked, "What ethnicity are you?" or "How much money do you have?"

The only question that matters is, "How can we heal you?"

Together, we have the will and the skill to rescue Jackson. It will be difficult – but it will be done.

Marcos José Lapciuc is the chairman of the Public Health Trust Financial Recovery Board, the governing board of Jackson Health System.