

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Ten years of service to the community

Ten years ago, the Foundation for Community Health (FCH) was established with a bold mission — to build and strengthen high-quality programs and services that improve the health and well-being of residents in eastern Dutchess and southern Columbia counties and north-west Connecticut. For the past six years, I have served on the FCH board. Through this rewarding and life-enriching experience, I have learned that health and well-being are much deeper than conditions of physical or emotional experience. Health and well-being are, in their societal contexts, the outcomes of learning that reflect individual, community and generational values.

As a child born at the end of the baby boom, my early learning about health and well-being was instilled by my parents, peers and the generational culture. Yet for the many and extraordinary social innovations of that era, the birthright of liberty, justice “and good health” for all eluded its rightful place on our national agenda. In my teens, my mother’s premature death from a preventable disease taught me that health issues rooted in poverty or lack of access to care were accepted as tolerated injustices of a democratic society.

As an adult, I worked as a community worker with families whose health concerns

were often rooted in situational and generational poverty. We shopped at the same grocery store; our children attended the same schools. I still see some of those mothers today — yet the toll of lack of access to health care has aged many of them well beyond our similar ages. We continue to share unspoken bonds — love for our children and caring for our families. Yet, the difference in their access to consistent health care has taught them lessons of health and well-being shadowed by chronic illness, disability and even preventable deaths for far too many of them.

The Foundation for Community Health has improved the lives of thousands of area residents in its priority areas of oral health, behavioral health and access to services. Through a cadre of skillful grantees, the capacity of our friends and neighbors to receive prescription assistance, rural transportation, family dental services, addiction

prevention, immigrant outreach and behavioral health care has tangibly improved. Using a results-based accountability framework, the FCH focuses on outcomes that transform the long-term health and well-being of all our communities. To learn more about FCH’s progress, go to [www.fchealth.org](http://www.fchealth.org).

As the baby boom generation leaves its indelible mark on the health-care landscape, we can “unlearn” to tolerate health care disparities. The FCH teaches that lesson every day. When good health and well-being are the outcomes of learning, children won’t have to learn the heartbreaking lesson of losing a mother from a preventable disease. A lesson that makes serving on the Foundation for Community Health board so meaningful to me. A lesson that no child should ever have to learn.

Katie Palmer-House, Chair  
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