



**Strengthening Oklahoma's Safety Net,  
One Community At A Time**

## **Board Bulletin**

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### **Board Members: Ambassadors of Goodwill**

With consumer governance, board members serve a dual role in linking with the community: 1) Serving as the voice of their communities to ensure that health care needs are met; and 2) Promoting the health center and its mission to the community. In November 1999, OPCA was asked to participate in a statewide effort known as the *Governor's Task Force on Rural Economic Development*. The initial impetus for the effort was rural health. As OPCA Executive Director Greta Shepherd Stewart proposed community health centers (CHCs) as a viable health solution, a prominent state leader scoffed at the idea, saying "consumer governance will never fly in Oklahoma." This same sentiment is a primary reason why Oklahoma had so few CHCs prior to the *Presidential Initiative*. Oklahoma has experienced success in recent years - growing from four grantees to eight; and from six health delivery sites to seventeen statewide. While we are excited about the growth, now more than ever board members must fulfill their role as health center ambassadors to prove to state leadership that consumer governance can work for the good of the community.

#### **Health Center Ambassadors**

It is common knowledge that U.S. Ambassadors serve to promote goodwill and to keep communication lines open between the United States and their assigned countries. Likewise, board members should view themselves as ambassadors of goodwill for the health center - at the community, state and national levels.

◆ **Duty of Loyalty** - As a health center ambassador, you must be well versed in 'Duty of Loyalty' - the fundamental duty to be faithful to the organization. Board members must have undivided allegiance to the health center. This is especially important if the health center is experiencing challenging times. Never, *never*, *never* should a board member publicly 'air dirty laundry' of the health center. Correct the problems within the framework of board operations but do not 'poor-mouth' the health center or its staff to community members or state officials. It is incredibly hard to restore confidence once a health center's internal bickering is made public. It also changes the focus from solving the problem to playing the blame game.

◆ **Community Relationships** - Knowing that health center viability depends on a solid patient base, board members should actively promote health center programs and services within the community. Health centers must strive to be the 'providers of choice' rather than the last option for community residents seeking preventive care. By developing policy and monitoring implementation of quality improvement activities, board members should confidently serve as the health center's biggest cheerleaders when interacting with community residents.

◆ **Public Relations** - While public relations can be as simple as speaking to civic groups, each member must know and adhere to the board's policy about communicating with the media. The board should have a media plan that includes a designated spokesperson. Foster positive relationships with the local media. Members should fully understand the board's position on important issues so that they are able to explain and support that position to the public. Think proactively about issues, appropriate responses, and board policy so that you are not caught in a reactive mode - which most always results in disaster.

◆ **Advocacy** - More legislators and policy makers are becoming interested in the CHC program. We have a prime opportunity to show how valuable health centers are to addressing Oklahoma's health care needs. As lawmakers review appropriations, it is critical that they see the value of investing state and federal dollars into Oklahoma CHCs. Board members must understand their role as advocates for not only their health center but the entire 330 program when vying for appropriations. As we lose friends in the legislature to term limits, board members will play a crucial role in fostering new champions who will fight for the CHC program.

Board members should make every effort to become the best of ambassadors when it comes to promoting their health center. Let it not be said in November 2005 that CHCs will never succeed in Oklahoma because of consumer governance.

**Oklahoma Primary Care Association**

**4300 N. Lincoln Blvd., Ste 203, OKC, OK 73105**

**(405) 424-2282, Ext. 104 • Fax (405) 424-1111 • [www.okpca.org](http://www.okpca.org)**

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