Franklin County’s four not-for-profit hospital systems have a long-standing history of collaborating to address the most pressing health care challenges facing the central Ohio community. Their collaborative efforts have focused on establishing and maintaining a high-quality, accessible and affordable health care system for the citizens of central Ohio. In June 2008, the hospital systems formalized and strengthened their commitment to collaboration through creation of the Central Ohio Hospital Council. COHC members – Mount Carmel Health System, Nationwide Children’s Hospital, the Ohio State University Medical Center and OhioHealth – share a common vision: The issues facing central Ohio’s health care system can be solved much more effectively when hospitals work as collaborators rather than competitors. The Central Ohio Hospital Council has formalized this belief by serving as the convener, advocate and neutral forum for discussion of today’s most pressing health issues among central Ohio hospitals.

During the past year – and even prior to the formation of the hospital council – the four hospital systems have collaborated on a number of initiatives that impact health care delivery in our community in a positive way. Following are highlights of a few of the major collaborations that demonstrate a collective commitment to addressing health issues in our community.
For the past six years, hospitals throughout the greater central Ohio region have come together to share, learn and implement best practices to improve the quality of patient care in specific clinical areas. In the fall of last year, hospitals participating in the Central Ohio Hospital Quality Collaborative issued “All the Care, All the Time,” a report that showcases the success of hospitals’ efforts to improve patient care, specifically for pneumonia, heart attack and heart failure patients. Through the coordination of the Ohio Hospital Association, hospital teams have learned best practices recommended by national quality organizations in these areas and have worked to achieve specific benchmarks for ensuring that patients receive all of the evidence-based recommended care for their condition. The result: improved quality of care, better clinical outcomes and saved lives.

Specifically, over a two-year period, central Ohio hospitals demonstrated:

- 5.4% improvement in providing recommended care to heart attack patients,
- 8.1% improvement in providing recommended care to heart failure patients, and
- 38% improvement in providing recommended care to pneumonia patients.

In addition to continuing their collective efforts at improving heart attack, heart failure and pneumonia care, central Ohio hospitals are also partnering with the Ohio Business Roundtable and Cardinal Health to reduce infections. Through the Solutions for Patient Safety initiative, central Ohio hospitals are working to reduce by half central line catheter-associated blood borne infections and health care-associated methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus infections by June 2010. The initiative will issue a report to the community documenting the hospitals’ progress in addressing these important infection issues.
Providing Access to Mental Health Services

Facing reduced bed capacity due to state hospital closures and higher demand for mental health services due to tough economic times, central Ohio psychiatric care providers are working together to ensure continued access to care for patients in need of mental health services. Franklin County’s three adult hospitals are partnering with Netcare, a local mental health and substance abuse crisis intervention facility, and Twin Valley Behavioral Health, a state psychiatric hospital, to communicate bed availability throughout the area and place patients in need of psychiatric care. Representatives from each mental health provider communicate daily by conference call to share bed availability, patient waiting lists for bed placement and other relevant information – all in order to place the right patient in the right bed at the right time. The Central Ohio Hospital Council has developed and houses a Web-based bed board that assists local providers with their work in communicating patient needs and bed availability. This collaborative effort has reduced time spent by patients in hospital emergency departments and expedited the process to place patients in an appropriate psychiatric facility to get the care they need.
Improving Pregnancy Care and Ensuring Better Birth Outcomes

As is the case in many communities, infant mortality in Franklin County is a serious health concern, and strategies are needed to improve access to, capacity for and utilization of prenatal care. Dating back to 1992, central Ohio’s not-for-profit hospitals, along with Columbus Public Health, convened the Franklin County Leadership Council to Reduce Infant Mortality. From that early initiative the Council on Healthy Mothers and Babies was born in 2001, with a vision to inspire commitment, collaboration and mobilization toward healthy mothers and babies from a multicultural perspective. The Council works to reduce infant mortality by educating service providers and the community about issues affecting infant mortality. In 2003, the Council, with funding from the hospital systems, implemented the Pregnancy Care Connection (PCC) hotline (614.227.9866), a centralized phone system for scheduling initial prenatal care appointments for uninsured or underinsured pregnant women in Franklin County. With one convenient number to call, women have easier access to prenatal care, are able to get into an OB clinic provider sooner and are more aware of available clinic providers, thereby increasing access to care during the first trimester of pregnancy. As of April 2008, PCC has helped over 10,000 women obtain prenatal care. The four hospital systems are also participating in Ohio Better Births Outcomes, an initiative to reduce the number of recurrent preterm births by encouraging pregnant women to access early prenatal care and obtain medication, known as 17-P, that reduces the incidence of spontaneous preterm birth by 35 percent. The four systems are working to ensure that uninsured, low-income pregnant women receive the necessary prenatal care as well as the recommended course of treatment to meet the preterm birth reduction goals for this initiative.

Columbus Fetal Medicine Collaborative

In 2008, the four hospital systems came together to form the Columbus Fetal Medicine Collaborative, a joint program to provide comprehensive care for fetuses diagnosed with an abnormality and their families. The collaborative aims to establish a community-wide resource that provides coordinated care for mother and baby in the area of maternal-fetal medicine, as well as care delivered in utero and post delivery, to ensure best quality outcomes. The collaboration will provide an efficient way to care for fetuses who have been diagnosed by specialists with serious conditions such as chest anomalies, fetal tumors, neurologic and cardiac conditions and problems associated with twins. The hospital systems will also collaborate on research to provide the most innovative care solutions available.
Employers across the nation are struggling to provide health care benefits to employees, with health care costs increasing at a much faster rate than business revenues. Much of the discussion on ways to contain costs focuses on making our system more efficient, including promoting technology to connect the health care community. Central Ohio’s hospital systems are working with the area’s large employers and others to discuss the creation of a system that enables health information to be shared among providers in the central Ohio region. This initiative will help accelerate the adoption of electronic medical record (EMR) systems in hospitals, clinics, health centers and private physician practices.

Separately, COHC is working with other community groups to advance an initiative in which area emergency departments can exchange information allowing them to better coordinate patient care. In other cities, such as Milwaukee, local emergency departments are linked together to improve patient care by sharing patient care history; to identify patients who routinely utilize ED services, often for non-urgent care; and to educate those patients on more appropriate health care settings, such as community health centers and hospital-based primary care clinics. As a result, costs are reduced due to fewer duplicate tests being run, and patient health is improved due to shared patient information and improved access to a medical home.
Educating Low Literacy and Limited English Speaking Patients

In 2005, the four Franklin County hospital systems launched a Web site, www.HealthInfoTranslations.org, to address a growing problem within the central Ohio community: a lack of patient education materials for low-literacy and limited English-speaking patients. The hospitals recognized that more and more individuals in our community have limited English language skills or a low literacy level, which could be a barrier to their ability to fully understand healthcare-related information. HealthInfoTranslations.org includes more than 3,000 resources to help clinicians teach patients with complex communications needs. The patient education materials are available in English and 17 additional languages, including Arabic, Bosnian, Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Hindi, French, Russian, Ukrainian, Vietnamese, Spanish, Somali, Marshallese, Portuguese and Tagalog. Health topics on the site include diagnostic tests, diseases and conditions, exercise and rehabilitation, food and diet, health and wellness, home care, pain and comfort, pediatrics, pregnancy and baby care, safety, stress and coping, and surgeries and treatments.

The site has been receiving on average more than 8,000 visits a day. Most users come from Ohio, but there have been users from all states in the country and from nearly 100 foreign countries. HealthInfoTranslations.org has been identified by the National Libraries of Medicine/Medline Plus as setting the “gold standard” for translated materials and has been cited by the Joint Commission as a premier example of evidenced-based practice in patient safety. Last winter, the site received an award from the Institute for Safe Medication Practices for excellence in the prevention of medical errors and adverse drug events.

Increasing Vaccination Rates for Franklin County Citizens

Dating back to 1992, Columbus hospitals have partnered with Columbus Public Health on an initiative to increase immunization rates for children in Franklin County. Before the initiative began, local immunization rates were estimated to be at 40 percent. Over the years, Project L.O.V.E. (Love Our Kids…Vaccinate Early!) has focused on immunization awareness, promotion, accessibility and availability through strategies utilizing the media, partnerships and collateral materials. Immunization rates have since improved to 86.4 percent. Franklin County was recognized by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in March 2006 for having the highest urban immunization rate in the country.
Hospitals Investigating Collaboration on New Cancer Treatment

The four hospital systems are working with Battelle to investigate the feasibility of bringing a proton therapy cancer treatment facility to Ohio. Proton therapy delivers radiation to a more targeted area than traditional approaches. It has the potential to spare more healthy tissue or organs because the radiation more precisely hits the tumor. Patients could experience fewer side effects, reduced hospitalization and improved medical benefits with the technology.

The hospitals and Battelle are in the process of conducting a detailed, in-depth review of bringing such a facility to Ohio. The hospitals also plan to assemble a physician advisory team to provide expertise in the areas of clinical research and education. The project could not only significantly impact the health and well-being of central Ohioans, but also bolster economic development for central Ohio.
Caring for the Uninsured

Franklin County hospitals have seen large spikes in the number of uninsured patients seeking care, with admissions rising three-and-a-half times the amount of the overall population in the last four years alone. Unlike many other large cities, where designated charity care hospitals are established, Columbus is fortunate that local hospitals have a long-standing commitment to share responsibility for providing care to all members of our community, regardless of their ability to pay. Hospital leaders recently reaffirmed that commitment by adopting a uniform charity care policy in which they agree to follow the same guidelines when providing free and significantly discounted care to patients. Agreement among hospitals on a policy for sharing the charity care burden is unique among major metropolitan areas around the country, and it results in a single-tier health care system in which all Franklin County residents have access to the same hospitals and the same quality of care.

Local hospitals also are demonstrating their commitment to caring for the uninsured through their support of two local initiatives that focus on care to the indigent. Since 1993, the Columbus Medical Association has operated an evening walk-in, episodic care clinic in the downtown area for homeless and other medically indigent individuals to increase availability of and access to health care services and to link persons to ongoing primary care providers. Similarly, since 2003, Access Health Columbus has operated an organized voluntary network to link low-income residents with medical homes and improve their access to specialty care. Local hospitals support both programs by donating medical services. In 2008, Columbus hospitals donated $6.1 million of charitable medical services for vulnerable people in our community through these two initiatives.

The hospital systems are also working collaboratively to educate patients on how to apply for assistance when they have unpaid hospital bills. Local hospitals are working with patient advocacy groups on a publication, "There IS Help Paying Your Hospital Bill," which will help alleviate the fears of uninsured patients with unpaid hospital bills and direct people on how to apply for financial assistance.
Educating the Community on Threats to Our Hospitals

Central Ohio’s network of not-for-profit hospital systems is one of our community’s greatest assets. Our community hospital system offers top-quality care that is reasonably priced, features a high degree of collaboration among the four systems, and is accessible to all members of the community, regardless of ability to pay.

Unfortunately, a number of threats are jeopardizing this valued community asset. In recent years, central Ohio hospitals have seen significant increases in charity care and shortfalls from government-sponsored health care programs. They’ve also witnessed an influx of limited-service, for-profit health care facilities that siphon away profitable service lines and the revenue they produce, which our not-for-profits hospitals need to support vital community health programs. As a result of these cost pressures, local businesses are paying higher insurance premiums. Without action, these trends will continue and the health care delivery system that has served the central Ohio community well for decades will be at risk.

The chief executive officers of the four systems are working together to educate local community and business leaders on the issues facing local hospitals and seeking their input and guidance on possible solutions. A presentation, “Healthcare in Columbus: Our Community at Risk,” has been developed to highlight the threats to the hospital system. A publication, “Franklin County Charity Care Issues,” has been issued to detail the escalating costs hospitals are incurring to provide care to our most vulnerable citizens.
Containing Costs Through Collaboration

While health care costs have soared the past decade across the nation and in Ohio, local employers have enjoyed health care costs that are below state and national averages. That is due in large part to the collective efforts of Columbus hospitals to contain their costs by sharing services.

One example is the formation in 2002 of a nonprofit joint venture between OhioHealth and Mount Carmel Health System to operate a combined laundry facility to service their facilities. The laundry service, Central Ohio Medical Textiles, provides full laundry processing and delivery services to the two health systems’ 11 hospitals and 49 affiliated ambulatory service locations throughout central Ohio. OhioHealth processes approximately 15 million pounds of laundry per year, and Mount Carmel generates an additional 7 million pounds.

Another example is the formation in 1994 of MedFlight, a nonprofit joint venture between OhioHealth and the OSU Medical Center to consolidate the systems’ rotor wing transport services. Fifteen years later, the hospitals are saving millions of health care dollars annually by eliminating duplication and simplifying access to emergency transportation, while maintaining high-quality care.