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February 18, 2010

Governor Pat Quinn
207 Statehouse
Springfield, IL 62706

Re: Nursing Home Safety Task Force Final Report

Dear Governor Quinn:

On behalf of our 200 member hospitals and health systems, the Illinois Hospital Association is alarmed by the Nursing Home Safety Task Force's recommendation that hospitals initiate criminal background checks on all patients being discharged to long term care facilities. The vast majority of hospital patients discharged to nursing homes are in need of medical care and do not pose a risk to other nursing home residents. At the same time, initiating, and receiving, criminal backgrounds on patients prior to hospital discharge will delay hospitals discharges and cause a backlog of patients waiting for admission. Please do not adopt this recommendation as it has too many unintended consequences for the entire health care delivery system.

As you review these recommendations, please consider the following facts:

- Hospitals already report significant challenges finding nursing homes willing to accept patients with known felony backgrounds. Many patients needing nursing home beds have languished in expensive hospital beds, sometimes for months, because facilities were reluctant to accept them, or outright refused them.
- Because hospitals cannot exceed their licensed bed capacity, patients remaining in hospital beds, who should be discharged, cause new patients to be "boarded" in the emergency department, until a bed becomes available. Delayed discharges directly impact hospital emergency department overcrowding. Delayed discharges deny other patients, in need of those beds, appropriate hospital services.
- Medicare and other third party payors do not pay for hospital care when it is no longer "medically necessary." Hospitals have had to absorb the costs of housing patients beyond their need for hospitalization. If a patient no longer needs to be hospitalized, that patient should be discharged to a more appropriate, and less costly, setting.

Governor, hospitals urge you to adopt a systems approach to the problems created by mixing our vulnerable elderly and disabled population with felony offenders, when both are in need of skilled nursing services. This problem should not be shifted to hospitals. Nursing homes should be equipped to provide adequate and appropriate mental health services, when this level of care is necessary, to meet the needs of their residents. At a minimum, Illinois should endeavor to provide supportive housing, and wrap around services, for persons with mental health issues, including case management, along with a services structure to support their recovery.

Sincerely,

Howard A. Peters III
Senior Vice President

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