

Opinion



Letter Drop

- Our Readers Sound Off

Goodland hospital cares

To The Free Press:

Following our mother's surgery in Hays, my sister and I were looking forward to bringing her home to our own hospital and to the care of the doctor she has known for the past twenty years.

Unfortunately, that was not to be, as this was the day Dr. Hildyard was barred from seeing his patients in Citizens Medical Center. Of course we were very uneasy about the whole situation, but we'd like everyone to know (especially those patients of Dr. Hildyard who may end up in the same predicament) how our dilemma turned into a very gratifying experience.

Mother was picked up in Hays by the Sherman County EMS and hurried to the Goodland Regional Medical Center. There, she received the most attentive and loving care. The nurses and staff were constantly at her side and Dr. Hildyard came to see her every day, even though her progress was so good that really wasn't necessary.

And so, if the administrator and board of trustees of Citizens Medical Center think it's better to run a hospital with empty beds than to allow certain doctors to see their patients there, Goodland Regional Medical Center does a great job of making you and your loved one comfortable. It's only 30 minutes away by interstate, and Goodland also has a nice bowling alley.

Sincerely,

Jean Herbel and Janice Hanna
Colby
(Letter #136)

Shame on you!

To The Free Press:

I find that your publication of the person's name victimized by a local physician to be totally irresponsible and well outside the bounds of responsible journalism! Is it that you are so desperate for news that you would jeopardize the well being of that person? (or are you not aware of the various threats that have been made against individuals). Your conduct can be likened to a tabloid that has little regard for the privacy or individual rights of the person who is the victim in this case.

No other news publication that I have read (from other "competing" newspapers) has included her name. This is like publishing the name of a rape victim so her attacker has access to her address and potentially can attack her again.

I also find it interesting that Mr. (Tom) Dreiling is complaining bitterly about information being made available to other "competing" publications before he has access to them. Did it occur to either of you (Patty Decker, editor) that your presentation of the information in the past appears to carry a decidedly "Hildyard" slant on the facts and that articles that have been presented to you supporting the hospital have been omitted from your paper? Did it occur to you "how" the protesters who appeared at the hospital found out that the board was meeting?

As one reader suggested, there is always more to the story than one side! It is a shame that you have chosen to be ignorant of the very rules that facilities such as Citizens Medical Center have in place to deal with patients, employees and physicians and that by law, those proceedings must be kept confidential. And why is that? Because an investigation had to be done so that all parties would be protected. . . and that included Dr. Hildyard.

Now that the publisher has the same information as a "competing" newspaper, where is it being reported in the Colby Free Press? Or are you waiting for some other "light to dawn" before you publish it?

I think you and your publication have done a great disservice to the Colby community by being so pro-Hildyard and not so pro-fact. It is likely that we will not renew our subscription in the future. Other community papers seem to present the information in a much more unbiased manner.

Shame on you!

Paula McDaniel
Colby
(Letter #137)

COLBY FREE PRESS

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Colby, Kan. 67701

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State award-winning newspaper, General Excellence, Design & Layout Excellence, Column Writing, Editorial Writing, Sports Columns, News, Photography.

Official newspaper of Thomas County, Colby, Brewster and Rexford.

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THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published daily, every Monday through Friday, except the day observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day, by Haynes Publishing Co., 155 W. Fifth, Colby, Kan., 67701.

PERIODICALS POSTAGE is paid at Colby, Kan. 67701, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Colby Free Press, 155 W. Fifth, Colby, Kan., 67701.

THE BUSINESS OFFICE at 155 W. Fifth is open from 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday to Friday, closed Saturday and Sunday.

MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, which is exclusively entitled to the use for publication of all news credited to it or not otherwise herein. Member Kansas Press Association, Inland Press Association and National Newspaper Association.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES: In Colby by carrier: 4 months \$32, 8 months \$47, 12 months \$64. By mail with in Colby and the nine-county region of Thomas, Sheridan, Decatur, Rawlins, Cheyenne, Sherman, Wallace, Logan and Gove counties: 4 months \$44, 8 months \$56, 12 months \$72. Other Kansas counties and surrounding states: 4 months \$51, 8 months \$61, 12 months \$75. All other states, \$75, 12 months.

Nor'West Newspapers
Haynes Publishing Company



There is some good news, too

Edna Hatcher

- Keeping in Touch

Since we have a dispute in Colby — of hospital employees vs. a physician — and with regular patients watching (scarcely in a position to be refereeing), a Colby outsider would observe that there is a lack of nurses and attendants as well as doctors for the number of patients needing care.

For patients able to pay and patients not able to pay Citizens Medical center, one wonders how many hospital lie this are going out of business in the United States and indeed, in Kansas.

The good news is that **President Signs Legislation to Stem Nurse Shortage.**

On Aug. 1, President Bush signed into law the Nurse Reinvestment Act that eases the nationwide shortage of registered nurses, currently estimated at 125,000 and expected to grow to as much as 500,000 by 2020.

The bill, which the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare strongly supported, establishes a National Nurse Service Corps that provides scholarships and loans to nursing students who agree to serve after graduation for two years in a hospital with a critical shortage of nurses; expands loan-repayment programs; gives loan-cancellation incentives to nurses who receives master's or doctoral degrees to teach at nursing schools; and offers nurses continuing education, geriatric training, "career ladder" program and job advancement, and internship and mentor programs.

Read the following with one caveat — **I am a Democrat.**

The good news above was sent to me by Barbara

B. Kennelly, President and CEO of the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare. The following is also in her report to me as a member of the Leadership Circle.

Health care Provider "Give Back" Bill Expected Higher Reimbursements for Doctors, Nursing Homes

Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle (D-SD) is expected to introduce legislation in September that would "give back" health care providers some of the money Medicare has been "taking away" since 1997 by cutting reimbursements to doctors, hospitals, nursing homes and others who provide health care to Medicare enrollees. The reductions were put in place in the 1997 Balanced Budget Act as part of efforts to trim Medicare spending by \$115 billion. Providers have been complaining reimbursement cuts are too severe and affect patient care. Many experts say the cuts were necessary to keep Medicare financially sound and the federal budget in check.

Medicare will increase payments to hospitals for hospital stays by 2.95 percent, beginning Oct. 1, as

part of its annual reimbursement update. Each year, Medicare updates the rate to reflect changes in the cost of goods and services used by hospitals. As a result of this payment increase, Medicare is expected to pay approximately \$88 billion in 2003 to about 4,230 acute care hospitals for inpatient stays.

Medicare also will increase payments to nursing homes by 2.6 percent, or \$400 million, in fiscal year 2003. But nursing home will still end up with less. That's because temporary add-on payments to nursing homes are set to expire in October, reducing reimbursements by \$1.4 billion. The difference between the two reimbursement adjustments leaves nursing home with a net decrease of \$1 billion for 2003.

The National Committee supports extending add-payments to nursing homes, as long as the increase is conditional on nursing homes improving staffing levels.

Barbara B. Kennelly has written "Key Prescription Drug Benefit Falls Short in the Senate" and "Congress to Resume Work on Rx Benefit in Fall." Another is "Senate Passes Measures to Lower Rx Prices." I am planning to send her explanation of these activities also.

Ms. Edna A. Hatcher of Colby frequently submits letters and other correspondence to the Colby Free Press. Some are in the form of letters, but this one is being treated as column material. Comments can reach her at 760 South School in Colby, or 462-2581.

Same news on every channel

Don Monkerud

- Another Viewpoint

If you notice that news stories on radio, TV, and in the newspaper sound as if they were scripted from the same source, you are right.

Increasingly the media speaks with the same voice and stories are written from the same sources. All of the news sounds alike because media companies are owned by a smaller and smaller group of media conglomerates.

Consider the increasing media concentration. In 1981, 46 media companies controlled most of the book, magazine, newspaper, movie and TV industries. By 1986, this number shrank to 29 and in 1997 it was down to seven.

For example:

* AOL-Time Warner, the world's largest media company, with 79,000 employees and \$32 billion in yearly revenue, owns 12 film companies, 24 book publishers, 35 magazines with a readership of 120 million, and 27 million AOL subscribers spending 84 percent of their time on AOL alone.

* Disney, with 120,000 employees and \$25 billion in yearly revenue, owns five magazine publishing groups and four major newspapers, ABC television, 10 TV and 29 radio stations in addition to eight major film companies.

* Bertelsmann, with 65,000 employees and \$16 billion in yearly revenue, is the world's largest publisher, moving over one million books a day in the United States, and owns 200 music labels and 80 magazines worldwide.

A second tier of media firms, such as the Tribune Company, Dow Jones, Gannett, Knight-Ridder and Hearst, compete with these conglomerates and are giants in their turn. They rank among the top 1,000 companies worldwide, and accumulate more than one billion dollars apiece in yearly sales. On the television front, two-thirds of all newspapers and one-

seventh of all TV stations have no competition in their local markets.

Major newspaper chains own television stations as well: News Corp. owns 33, Tribune Co. has 23, Gannett owns 22, and New York Times Co. owns 8. Fewer companies controlling information means that many opinions are not heard by a large audience.

"It's very clear how conglomeration affects the news," says Kristina Borjesson, former CBS and ABC reporter and editor of "Into the Buzzsaw," a collection of essays by award-winning journalists on their personal experiences with censorship. "The press is a lot less free because a handful of companies have access to millions of people. There are black holes in reporting — such as the military and international news — that are dangerous for democracy and America."

In the book industry, Mike Shatzkin, founder of Idea Logical Co., estimates that in 2002 a mere six companies dominate consumer publishing. Additionally, two retail chains, Borders, Barnes & Noble, and a few smaller chains dominate bookstore sales.

While some argue that every good book will get published, distribution is a major problem. The most cursory survey of book reviews reveals that books from huge publishers dominate the lists. Other books, such as those critical of the media, opposed to con-

glomerates or presenting alternate views on globalization or U.S. domination, invariably find small publishers with limited resources for distribution and marketing.

Currently, some conglomerates are divesting book publishers because they have not been able to boost the traditional 4 percent rate of return to the 15 percent expected by Wall Street. Yet books represent prestige and important ideas which give media conglomerates an opportunity to "share content," market across a number of media to increase sales, and tie-in with movie and CD releases.

While conglomerates sell off book publishers, Aaron J. Moore, author of "Who Owns What," a Web site maintained by the Columbia School of Journalism, expects conglomerates to focus their acquisition sights on advertising-driven media such as newspapers, radio and TV. He foresees that traditional rules of "cross-ownership," which limit news monopolies in cities, will be severely curtailed or eliminated by the Federal Communications Commission in spring 2003. One company will be permitted to own all the radio, TV stations, cable stations and newspapers in one market area. Not only could the same company control all of the news outlets but the same reporter could also provide the news for each outlet.

"There is a valid concern," says Moore. "If one company has so many opportunities to talk to the public, it controls all the voices. To a certain extent this reminds people of 1984 and Big Brother."

Don Monkerud is an Aptos, Calif.-based freelance writer who writes on politics, technology and social issues. He is the author of a novel, "Twister Country," and editor of "Free Land: Free Love: Tales of a Wilderness Commune." For more information, contact: monkerudcruzio.com.

Doonesbury

- Gary Trudeau

