Testimony of

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Before the

U.S. House of Representatives

Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health

Hearing on

"Making Health Care Work for American Families:

Ensuring Affordable Coverage"

March 24, 2009

My name is Dr. Michael A. Sitorius. I am the Waldbaum Professor of Family Practice and Chair of the Department of Family Medicine at the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC). I am testifying today as a representative of the Bellevue Medical Center and not as a representative of UNMC.

I would like to thank you, Mr. Chairman, for conducting this Subcommittee hearing on the accessibility to health care. I appreciate the opportunity to testify. I am here today to share information about the Bellevue Medical Center, which is currently under construction in Bellevue, Nebraska, a suburb of Omaha. The Bellevue Medical Center is an entirely different animal than anything we have seen across the country. It will be a full-service, community hospital, providing a wide array of services, including a full blown emergency room, to a very large segment of one of the largest -- if not the largest -- communities in the United States without an acute care hospital nearby. The Bellevue Medical Center, which is majority owned by the largest public hospital system in the State, is expected to open to patients in April of next year (2010).

The Bellevue Medical Center illustrates how hospitals and doctors can work together to enhance the access to health care for a population in need. In many ways, I believe the Bellevue Medical Center represents the best in American health care. When we open our doors next spring, we will be a shining example of how a public hospital system; a group of committed and talented physicians; a supportive city government; and a thriving and responsive business community can come together to make critical care accessible again to a large and underserved population.

In my remarks on expanding the access to health care, I will focus on the following subjects:

- Background on the city of Bellevue, Nebraska
- The need for a community hospital in Bellevue
- Description of the Bellevue Medical Center
- and the Bellevue Medical Center as a model for other hospitals.

Background on the Bellevue, Nebraska.

As way of background, Bellevue is the third largest city in the great state of Nebraska. According to the 2000 census, it has a population of more than 44,300 residents and is part of the Omaha-Council Bluffs metropolitan area. Bellevue is the home of the Offutt Air Force Base and the United States Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM). Approximately 10,000 active duty military personnel, 20,000 dependents of active duty military personnel and 11,000 military retirees live in the immediate Bellevue area. As these numbers illustrate, the military community is quite important to Bellevue and the surrounding area. Furthermore, Bellevue is located in Sarpy County which, according to the U.S Census Bureau, is the fastest growing county by population in Nebraska and Western Iowa.

Need for a community hospital in Bellevue, Nebraska.

It may come as a surprise to many that Bellevue does not currently have a community hospital or an emergency room in the city. As mentioned earlier, it is potentially the largest city in the United States without a full service hospital. To further illustrate the need for a community hospital, the Offutt Air Force Base military hospital, Ehrling Bergquist, closed in

2005. This Air Force hospital closed because of financial cuts related to the Base Closure Realignment Commission. There remains an Ehrling Bergquist Clinic on the Air Force Base which currently has limited outpatient services including same-day surgery and evening urgent care, but this clinic is also scheduled to close in the fall of this year (2009).

As a family practice physician, I see first hand the strong need for a hospital in Bellevue. There are approximately 180,000 people in Eastern Nebraska and Western Iowa who would benefit from a community hospital in the Bellevue area. This is a fairly large population which right now does not have access to healthcare close to home. These individuals need a full service community hospital with an emergency room near their homes.

Moreover, individuals of low and moderate income will definitely benefit from a community hospital in Bellevue. According to the 2000 census, the median income for a household in the city of Bellevue was approximately $47,000, and the median income for a family was about $54,000. About 4% of families and 6% of the population are below the poverty line, including 8% under age 18 and about 4% over age 65.

To further illustrate how low-income individuals could benefit from a full-service hospital, the UNMC physician group currently has a clinic in the Bellevue area. This clinic serves a significant low-income and/or Hispanic population which live in South Omaha. A full-service community hospital in Bellevue would provide important health care to this same population group.

Furthermore, I have a unique vantage point on the medical needs of the area as I am the chair of the Department of Family Medicine at the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC). UNMC has a Family Medicine Residency Program that provides family medicine training for active duty U.S. Air Force physicians. This three year training program is for those physicians who are located at the 55th Medical Group on the Offutt Air Force Base. The UNMC Family Medicine Residency Program is one of only five Air Force family medicine programs in the nation. Unfortunately, the former training facility for these Air Force family physicians was Ehrling Bergquist Hospital which, as discussed earlier, closed in 2005.

As a result of this closure of Ehrling Bergquist, I became convinced that Bellevue needed a community hospital that could serve both the military and civilian populations as well as become established as a training facility for the Air Force family practice physicians. Thus, the idea of the Bellevue Medical Center was born.

Description of the Bellevue Medical Center

The Bellevue Medical Center is a creative solution to address the healthcare needs of the community it will serve. Our approach is unique and we believe the only one of its kind in the United States. The Bellevue Medical Center is aligned with an academic medical center (The Nebraska Medical Center), faculty physicians and community physicians.

The Bellevue Medical Center will be a full service hospital that is expected to provide the full scope of medical services beginning in April 2010. It will open with 100 private, inpatient beds providing general medical services, labor and delivery care, emergency care, inpatient and outpatient surgery, and intensive care. The facility will feature significant investments in medical technologies, diagnostic services, two cardiac catheterization labs, on-site inpatient and

outpatient pharmacy services, laboratory testing, and physician clinic space. There will also be a medical office building adjacent to the hospital which will house outpatient clinics. Future expansion of the facility will allow for an additional 100 beds.

The ownership structure of the Bellevue Medical Center is as follows:

- 60% share owned by a regional academic and trauma medical center, The Nebraska Medical Center;
- a 18% share owned by UNMC Physicians, a medical practice for UNMC faculty (which is a non-profit 501(c)(3) education affiliated institution);
- and a 22% share owned by Bellevue and local community physicians.

The Bellevue Medical Center will hold strongly to the values of The Nebraska Medical Center, known for its excellence, innovation and quality patient care. With The Nebraska Medical Center's quality movement in full speed, the hospital has seen steady improvements and efficiencies in numerous areas including customer service, delivery of care, patient and employee satisfaction, reduction of medical errors, lowering average lengths of stay and mortality. These developments are illustrated in the following two awards that The Nebraska Medical Center has received.

- The Nebraska Medical Center has been recognized four years in a row for providing "An Outstanding Inpatient Experience" by J.D. Power and Associates, a global market research firm. According to J.D. Power and Associates, only 20-percent of all hospitals in the United States even qualify for consideration.
- The Nebraska Medical Center has also received the esteemed Magnet designation for extraordinary nursing care. The achievement, as determined by the American Nurses Credentialing Center's (ANCC) Magnet Recognition Program®, is widely viewed as the "gold standard" in the nursing profession.

The Bellevue Medical Center is also consistent with the educational mission of The Nebraska Medical Center. The Bellevue Medical Center will serve as a teaching hospital and training facility for 20% of the Air Force's compliment of family practice physicians. This will allow training in two different and separate locations.

1) An academic and trauma medical center, The Nebraska Medical Center
2) and a community hospital, the Bellevue Medical Center (beginning in 2010)

The Bellevue Medical Center is valuable because the community hospital setting more closely mirrors the facility where the Air Force residents will likely practice after completion of the training program. When the Bellevue Medical Center opens, it will train 8 new family practice residents a year. Because it is a three year program, 24 residents are in training at any given time.

In this time of an economic downturn, it is important to point out that health care can continue to be a job creator. It is possible to both expand access to health care and expand access to jobs. As of today, the exterior enclosure of the Bellevue Medical Center is expected to be done by the end of May. The dry walling of the Bellevue Medical Center is in progress along with accompanying electrical and plumbing work. As the status of this project indicates, the

project is providing important construction-related work. Furthermore, the Bellevue Medical Center will create 600 jobs in its first year and will grow as the hospital grows.

The Bellevue Medical Center has strong community support. In fact, the community is extremely engaged and has led the effort to help make the Bellevue Medical Center a reality. In particular, its community supporters include: the Bellevue and Sarpy Chambers of Commerce, the Bellevue City Leadership, and local law enforcement and fire departments.

The Bellevue Medical Center as a model

I believe that the Bellevue Medical Center can serve as a healthcare model for other communities. The nation's health care system needs to encourage innovation through partnerships. In our case, an academic medical center partnered with faculty physicians and community physicians. In many of the nation's urban areas, there are public or private academic medical centers. These institutions, in many cases, have the resources and service-oriented mission, to help provide care to those in greatest need. I would encourage academic medical centers to attempt to replicate what The Nebraska Medical Center has done. Whether it be in an urban or rural setting, The Nebraska Medical Center would be happy to provide any insight on our model to other medical schools and/or medical facilities to help tailor their outreach to a community in need.

Moreover, the Bellevue Medical Center is as also a model as it relates to the care of our military service members, their families and military retirees. The Bellevue Medical Center, when open, will serve approximately 41,000 military active duty personnel, their families and military retirees who live in the immediate Bellevue area. It is our position that our military service members, their families and military retirees deserve the best quality of health care possible from a nearby community hospital. Bellevue Medical Center will be able to provide this care.

Active military and retirees receive health benefits from what is called TRICARE. The Bellevue Medical Center will accept and looks forward to working with TRICARE patients. We also look forward to working with our Department of Veteran Affairs' hospital system and augmenting the excellent quality of care that they currently provide.

In conclusion, as Congress begins to tackle health care reform, access to healthcare must be a significant part of any solution. I am proud to say that the Bellevue Medical Center stands ready to be part of the solution of expanding the access to healthcare. Everybody seems to be excited that we are coming to Bellevue. And we are all excited that your Subcommittee has asked us to share our story with you all this morning.

Thank you very much for your attention and interest. I look forward to answering any questions that you may have.