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THANK YOU, DOCTOR!

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For a decade now, SOMOS Community Care, a New York City-based medical organization comprising more than 2,500 primary care physicians and their clinics, has worked and advocated for the important social role that the family doctor must once again play in the field of health and life care.

The primary care physician, or general practitioner, has long played a significant part in the health of families and society. The family doctor served this function by preventing and caring for the nuclear family, relying on their knowledge of its members, the closeness and trust of the patient-doctor relationship, and the advantages of knowing their culture and language.

In recent decades, this medical role has been both disdained and belittled. Scientific and technological advances, the proliferation of health insurance institutions, medical specializations, the profit motive, political interference in health systems, the bureaucratization and automation of medical services, etc., have impacted the critical and irreplaceable role of the family doctor and their personal relationship with the patient.

Today, primary care physicians worldwide, like the associates at SOMOS Community Care, are men and women sufficiently proven in the practice of their profession who remain up to date in their knowledge of medical science. They are health professionals who practice their medical profession caring for families in their neighborhoods, in the patients' culture and language, infusing their service with mysticism, professionalism, and spirit.

These primary care medical professionals, this valuable human resource for health, must be sufficiently valued and appreciated in a world in need of better sanitary conditions and more equitable opportunities in medical care for all human beings.

This medical and social function, beyond reaching vulnerable communities that cannot – for various reasons – access their right to health, also saves the State large sums of money since primary and family care – at a low economic cost – prevents the hasty and often unnecessary referral of large numbers of patients to hospital emergency rooms or hospitalizations.

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To rediscover, internationally, the primary or family doctor's human and social value in the field of medicine and healthcare, the SOMOS medical organization and the Doctor Ramon Tallaj Foundation, in association with the Pontifical Academy for Life, presided over by Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, and with the support of many medical and health institutions, such as the Federation of Catholic Doctors of the World and the Federation of Italian Doctors, has created the campaign "***¡GRACIAS DOCTOR!***" ("***THANK YOU, DOCTOR!***"). This campaign will officially launch in the City of Rome, from May 22 to 26, in a private audience of over 300 doctors with Pope Francis, to whom the DECLARATION FOR THE REDISCOVERY OF THE FAMILY DOCTOR will be presented.

The Catholic Church, aware of its presence in the world to carry out the same mission as the Master of Nazareth: "*to heal and cure every kind of sickness and disease*" through the new commandment of love, has founded – for centuries – hospitals and has promoted the care of health and life, especially for the weakest in society. For this reason, our campaign: "***¡GRACIAS DOCTOR!***" ("***THANK YOU, DOCTOR!***") has earned the support and blessing of Pope Francis.

This campaign, this call to governments and all institutions that comprise life in society, this call to restore the primary or family doctor to their adequate and predominant social role, was born at a historical juncture in which large masses of human beings, large numbers of human communities and societies are facing health crises and difficulties in accessing government systems for health care due to the most varied circumstances: epidemics, impoverishment, migratory movements, armed conflicts, natural disasters, etc.

At the same time, this campaign is grateful for the effortless, sacrificial, and committed professional practice of so many doctors who, across the world, sustain, with their anonymous and daily work, the health and life of so many and endure the – almost always – weak health systems of our societies.

As CEO of SOMOS Community Care, I invite everyone to join the "Thank You, Doctor!" campaign by visiting the graciasdoctor.org site to show your approval and support for this initiative that benefits the health and life of us all.

Mario J. Paredes is CEO of SOMOS Community Care, a social care network of over 2,500 independent providers responsible for reaching and delivering care to over 1 million Medicaid lives across New York City.