**SOMOS: May we be like the sandalwood tree…**

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Since its very beginnings, SOMOS Community Care was founded and has developed as an organization with the mission to create and cultivate a collaborative network of primary care physicians and their clinics. Our goal is to implement an innovative and revitalized model of healthcare that prioritizes the needs of our community's most vulnerable and underprivileged individuals, focusing especially on migrants in New York City.

The highest moral principles inspire us in our pursuit of the common good and we dedicate ourselves to the health and well-being of those we serve. Strong ethical values guide our healthcare organization in the interpersonal relationships we form within the company as well as in how we manage all economic and administrative aspects of our operations.

Our doctors focus on primary and family healthcare with a preventive approach and aim to relieve the strain faced by hospitals. We do this by championing a model where hospital institutions attend to patients with the most urgent and prioritized needs.

Through the years, we can trace the success of our healthcare services, as I have said, to the integration of hundreds of physicians and their clinics, as well as the government funding we have secured through the DSRIP program for state healthcare system reforms. We have been awarded this funding based on our exceptional results and competencies, which allows us to continue developing our mission and vision already detailed above. These results include reductions in the statistics that track stress on hospital emergency systems and reductions in rates of unnecessary hospitalizations.

Our healthcare model emphasizes prevention over treatment, and, as much as possible, healthcare is delivered in the patient's respective culture, customs, and language by physicians who are immigrants themselves. This model not only enhances the MEDICAID system, but it also reveals, let's not forget, the difficulties that our organization's work may face with the traditional hospital system, because, due to a lack of prior, personalized, and preventive care, large numbers of patients who do not need emergency services, or even hospital services at all, attend these facilities.

As the CEO of SOMOS, I can attest to the ethical standards, transparency, and honesty with which we manage our financial resources, the code of ethics that exists at the very heart of our organization, and the desire and spirit that drives us to continually improve our service to the health and well-being of all, particularly the most at-risk members of our city.

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We strive to ensure that all professional services contracted for the development or promotion of SOMOS are executed and compensated accordingly. Likewise, we also strive to guarantee that the healthcare services our network of affiliated physicians provides bear the hallmark of scientific excellence, efficiency, timeliness, and solidarity that the invaluable nature of healthcare demands.

At SOMOS, we are committed to promoting the highest and noblest values of the human spirit both within and outside our organization. We have fostered collaborative, non-denominational partnerships with various religious institutions, including Catholic, Muslim, Jewish, and Protestant denominations.

Our shared pursuit of the common good and the provision of healthcare, as integral values that support individuals, families, and society, has brought us together with these religious organizations. We have supported each other, especially during the pandemic, by utilizing their places of worship to facilitate health campaigns within their communities.

This collaborative work with religious communities has allowed us to personally connect with and draw inspiration from spiritual leaders such as Pope Francis, who continues to inspire us and all of humanity.

The prestige that SOMOS has earned with the passage of time can be traced to the vital healthcare services we have provided to our city, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, our humanistic vision and solidarity with those who suffer the most have driven us to extend our services, focused attention, and targeted assistance to communities experiencing catastrophes and emergencies in Haiti, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and beyond.

We aspire to continue to be an increasingly recognized and sought-after healthcare organization. We aim to expand and enhance our services over time, and to achieve this, we hope to continue relying on local, state, and national government support that aligns with our accomplishments, competencies, and workforce contributions.

Neither individuals nor institutions are immune to the challenges of competition, power dynamics, economic fluctuations, and political turbulence that are intrinsic to every society. At SOMOS, we see ourselves as a vital and dynamic component of the social fabric, embracing the risks associated with being an active and productive entity within society. We appeal to the trust of all in our vision and commitment to healthcare as we continue to grow and thrive.

Acknowledging the difficulties that all of us may encounter, individuals and organizations alike, be they due to internal or external causes, we, at SOMOS, strive to be, in the words of Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore, like the sandalwood tree that perfumes the very axe of the woodcutter that lays it low.

*Mario J. Paredes is a member of the Board of Directors of the Latin American Academy of Catholic Leaders.*

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