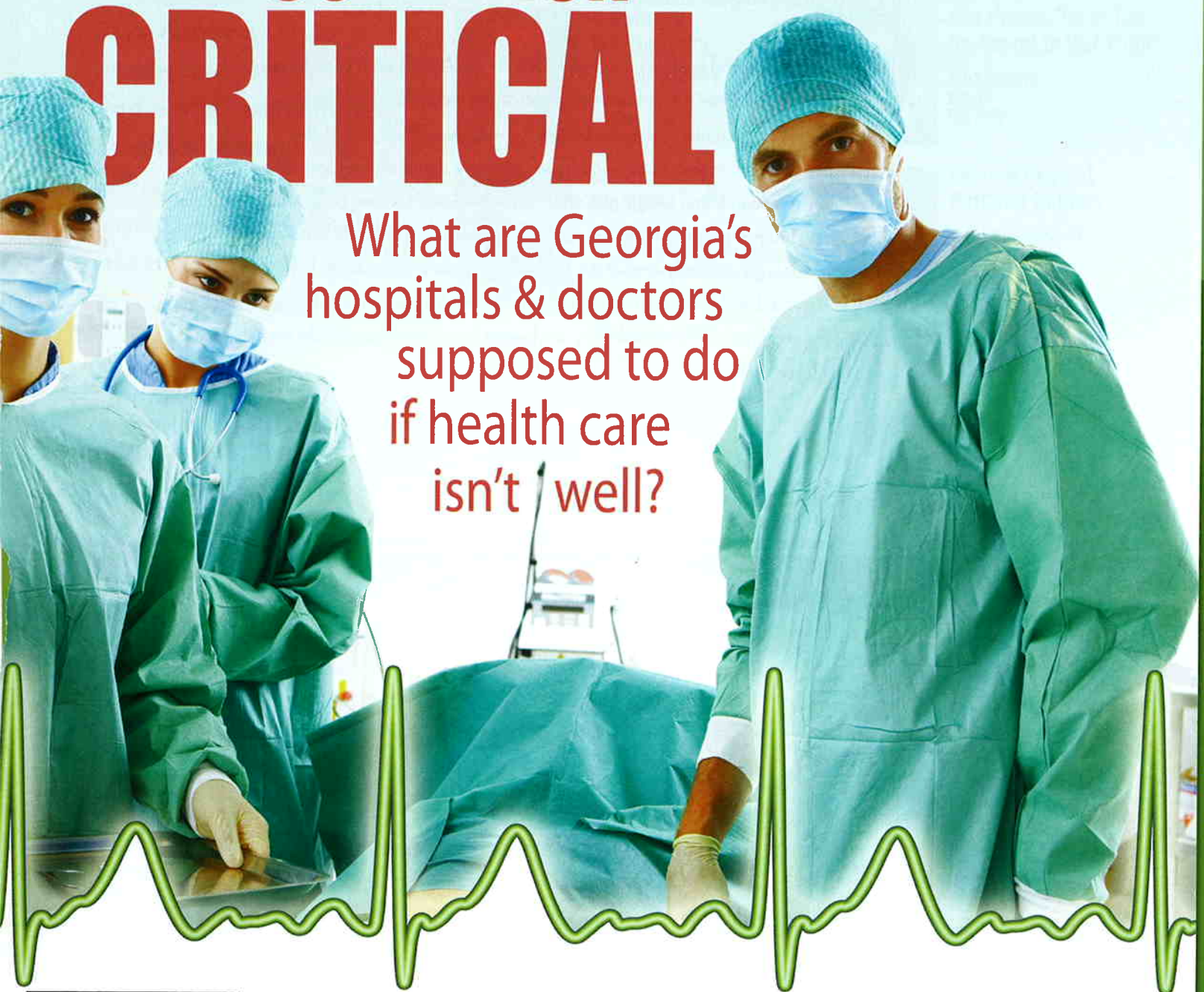


James

CONDITION CRITICAL

What are Georgia's hospitals & doctors supposed to do if health care isn't well?



FEBRUARY 2009
\$3.95

PRIVITIZATION OF CHILD WELFARE

Georgia is exploring how it might further privatize various aspects of its child welfare system. Privatization of child welfare is not new to this country. What is relatively new is "governmentalization." The result of this governmentalization is a loss of connectiveness, accountability and involvement with the community. Child welfare has become "what the government does" rather than what the family and community does.

When was the last time the community was blamed for a death of a child in that community? Usually it is the Commissioner of DHR standing up before a bevy of cameras explaining why the department was not in the home protecting the child. Even though the child would have been seen by neighbors, ministered to by churches, taught by teachers, cared for by physicians, and, hopefully, nurtured by relatives and other family members, the government becomes "the one to blame."

It was not until the twentieth century that government took an official position on the care and treatment of children. Up until this time, the community and its insti-

tutions rendered all social work, child welfare and human care in this country. ("Institutions" was not a bad word then, but represented long-standing community organizations.)

BY
**NORMER
ADAMS**

Georgia is home to the first and oldest continuously operated child welfare organization in the nation. Bethesda Home for Boys in Savannah, Georgia was established in 1740. Benjamin Franklin was an early investor in Bethesda, as was King George of England and Charles and John Wesley.

Even in recent times, we have seen where the community can and will step up to care for its children in a variety of programs across Georgia. In the late 1990's, when Georgia could not find enough foster homes for its children, within two years communities across Georgia provided homes and families for over 3,000 new foster care placements. Last year, when Georgia needed to provide for a comprehensive community based mental health system for its children, more than 200 community based agencies stepped forward to say, "we can do it, should do it and will do it." It

was a "yes, we can" type of response. In the late 80's when severely emotionally disturbed children were being shipped out of state for residential mental health treatment, organizations like Psychiatric Solutions of Georgia and Creative Community Services in Atlanta stepped forward and created programs that did not exist in Georgia.

This was not privatization; this was "communitization." Georgia needs to take a serious look at how it might further "communitize" its child welfare services through every activity of child welfare, from case management, court advocacy and family support, to foster care and psychiatric residential treatment. It will involve the community in identifying its needy children and sharing the responsibility for their care. It will return to the government what should be their only roles, which are contracting and regulation. Government should not be doing what the community should be doing.

Normer Adams is Executive Director of the Georgia Association of Homes and Services for Children.

