Richard Afable, a self-described frustrated jazz and pop musician, joined P&T’s editorial board in April 2000. He is Chief Medical Officer for Catholic Health East (CHE), the largest not-for-profit health care system on the eastern seaboard of the U.S. CHE is composed of 31 acute-care hospitals and 27 long-term care facilities, with approximately 44,000 employees.

Dr. Afable is part of the 10-member senior management team that guides the strategic direction and operation of the system. As Executive Vice President, he is responsible for all aspects of clinical performance and quality management. For example, he led a quality and cost-reduction project called Clinical Performance Improvement for CHE. This physician-led initiative produced $1.4 million and $1.8 million in cost savings in 2000 and 2001, respectively. The quality-improvement initiatives that he has implemented include a push for significant improvements in the use of drugs for heart failure, for appropriate antibiotic usage in cases of community-acquired pneumonia, and for reductions in the inappropriate use of diagnostic tests. The improvement in the use of drugs for heart failure involved a change in order sets for ACE-inhibitors so that they became the default treatment for heart-failure patients. For the patients with community-acquired pneumonia, Dr. Afable’s initiative enabled the administration of IV antibiotics within the critical four-hour window of time from diagnosis.

Dr. Afable provides direction and oversight for the Physician Leadership Council and the Managed Care Affinity Group. These are the primary vehicles for ensuring quality care and managed care performance in the system. In essence, Dr. Afable is interested in the difficult task of changing ingrained patterns of physician behavior to improve outcomes for patients. He says that “weeding out those people and processes, especially among health care professionals, that would knowingly manipulate or take advantage of those unable to speak for themselves” is what motivates him. “Making life better for those in need is why we work and live.”

Dr. Afable also has corporate responsibility for information technology (IT), managed care, patient safety, communications, and physician relationships. As the senior executive in charge of IT, he leads and directs a systems-wide IT standardization initiative that includes the implementation of computerized physician order entry (CPOE) across CHE.

Before his current position, Dr. Afable was the founder and president/CEO of Preferred Physician Partners (PPP), a physician practice management company that supported physician groups and provider networks in managed care markets in Ohio, Kentucky, and Pennsylvania. PPP managed the operations of more than 100 hospital-employed physician practices, reducing the total losses and loss per physician by 30% over a two-year period. PPP also provided data management and provider profiling for physician-hospital organizations (PHOs) and provider groups with more than 55,000 insured lives in global capitation and more than 350,000 HMO/PPO members overall. PPP dissolved as a company in 2000 because of changes in the medical marketplace. (Similar physician practice management companies like Phycor and MedPartners ceased operations during the same time period.)

Dr. Afable received his BS degree from Loyola University in Chicago and his MD degree from the Loyola Stritch School of Medicine. He obtained his MPH degree from the University of Illinois School of Public Health and a certificate in Business Administration from Villanova University in Pennsylvania.

He began his career in medicine with a private practice in internal medicine and geriatrics in Chicago. Since that time, he has held administrative positions at the Alzheimer’s Disease and Dementia Unit of the Wellington Plaza Nursing Center and at Saint Joseph Hospital, both in Chicago; at Bowman Gray School of Medicine of Wake Forest University, North Carolina Baptist Hospital, Bowman Gray/Baptist Hospital Medical Center, and QualChoice of North Carolina, Inc., all in Winston-Salem, North Carolina; and at Catholic Healthcare Partners (CHP) and the aforementioned Preferred Physician Partners, both in Cincinnati, Ohio. He has contributed articles to 13 journals and four books.

What made him decide to become involved with P&T?

“I was pleased to accept membership on the editorial board of P&T,” Dr. Afable says, “because of its leadership and influence position in driving the medication administration and safety agenda for hospitals and physician groups nationwide.”

Before joining the board of P&T, Dr. Afable was instrumental in recruiting editor-in-chief Dr. David Nash onto the board of CHP.

“Part of my impetus to bring David onto the CHP board was to instill a sense of quality into a group in which clinical issues around quality were quite foreign,” Dr. Afable says, “He has done that, and then some.”

In addition to his passion for music, Dr. Afable is an avid golfer and a fitness enthusiast. He has enjoyed watching his four children become young adults and adds that he is looking forward to rediscovering life with his wife of 27 years, Sally Nichols Afable.

What gets him most excited about what he does? The answer is simple: “It’s always about the patients.”