

PAYERS & PROVIDERS

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A Thought A Year On Healthcare

Reflections on a Long Career Bring Many Realizations

I woke up yesterday with the startling revelation that I have been working in healthcare for 37 years. And while there's still lots to learn, here are 37 things I've already discovered in my journey:

1. The same three challenges facing the industry 37 years ago -- cost, access and quality - are the same three issues we are grappling with today.
2. Doctors today need to compete not just against disease but against the expectations we have set for them.
3. Hospitals that always do the right thing don't need mission statements.
4. Most of the people who work in healthcare have good hearts.
5. Health insurance is too confusing. Few people know what they are buying.
6. It is public relations, not advertising, that best builds a hospital's brand.
7. Physicians who don't start communicating with their patients electronically will soon discover that they have no patients at all.
8. Nurses are unappreciated. So are therapists.
9. The debate surrounding healthcare reform is a moral issue and should be framed as such.
10. More healthcare mergers have failed due to culture and personalities than anything else.
11. Even with a movement to embrace "best practices," medicine remains an imperfect science.
12. The shortage of qualified caregivers for our aging society is clear and present danger.
13. Hospitals are doing their communities (and themselves) a disservice by continuing to populate their boards with yesterday's leaders.
14. People have the right to know what they are paying for, what they are getting for their money and why charges are what they are.
15. Doctors who say that managed care has forced them to provide "cookie-cutter medicine" should get out of the business.
16. Change happens slow.
17. Offering an encouraging remark or a gracious smile to a nervous patient goes a long way.
18. Healthcare executives who are timid in telling their story have no right to complain about bad press.



By
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19. We have taken some good steps to measure quality, but we're not there yet.
20. More isn't always better.
21. The Affordable Care Act is really going to test consumers' loyalty to their physicians.
22. The industry has been too sluggish in discussing death and dying.
23. I like pay for performance.
24. Of all the service industries, healthcare should be the leader in customer service, but it isn't.
25. A hospital is an amazing place.
26. An awful lot of money has been wasted by healthcare executives and hospitals chasing the industry's latest "flavor of the month" ideas.
27. You can tell that a physician's office is doing well if they still validate parking.
28. If we really want to lessen unnecessary medical costs, disability and suffering, we must address the epidemic of violence that is sweeping our country.
29. Addressing the epidemic of substance abuse would be a good idea too.
30. I can't predict what hospitals or health plans of the future will look like, but my guess is that people will always need doctors.
31. Those payers and providers who find a way to truly demystify healthcare will end up the winners.
32. Patient safety remains a major concern.
33. The real issue isn't who wins the healthcare reform debate, but who loses.
34. I would like to find a way to take the money out of healthcare, but I would also like to cure cancer, eliminate hunger and guarantee world peace.
35. Healthcare is filled with heroes, which is far more important than being filled with celebrities.
36. No matter what we do, the system will continue to be imperfect. But imperfection is part of the arc of America and it is up to each generation to try to make it work better.
37. In the end, it all comes down to trust.

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