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# PAYERS & PROVIDERS

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## Struggling Toward An Understanding *Obvious Changes Obviously Won't Come Easily*

Sometimes I feel as if I live in a different zip code than the rest of the world. There is so much I simply don't understand.

I keep thinking that what has puzzled me until now is simply the appetizer and it will all make sense once the main course arrives. But after 35 years in the industry, my appetite for answers is as strong as ever. I'm not talking about issues that stupefy even the smartest among us; I'm talking about subjects that should be as simple as a hula hoop.

I don't understand why hospitals continue to populate their boards with yesterday's leaders. With all due respect to those who helped build communities and are its enduring pillars, isn't it time for some fresh snap, crackle and pop? People in their twenties and thirties live in a different world than me. And likely a different world from you, too. They speak a different language, communicate through different mediums and are motivated by different drivers. It's time we heard from them in designing the future of community-based healthcare.

I don't understand why those in our industry, particularly physicians, and it necessary to cram their conversations with jargon. Okay. We get it. You've gone to medical school and learned words that nobody else understands. But in this era of consumer engagement, what about some plain talk? Patients and providers should be partners in healthcare, but using words consumers don't understand simply makes the distance between us that much greater.

I don't understand people who don't understand why healthcare costs what it does. Where do they think the money comes from to staff an emergency department 24/7? Or to pay for multi-million dollar diagnostic and surgical equipment? Or to conduct research that discovers new life-sustaining

drugs? Or to pay the salaries of nurses, pharmacists, radiologists and others? In every other slice of society people know that they get what they pay for, but it's a peculiar idiosyncrasy of our times that people don't apply that same thinking to healthcare.

I don't understand why our industry has been so slow to meaningfully confront the aging of America. Today, about 11 percent of our country is age 65 or older. In two decades, one in every five Americans will be elderly and by the midpoint of this century there will

be 1 million Americans over 100. Yet few medical schools require their graduates to have taken any classes in geriatric care, hospitals are unhurried to truly adopt meaningful palliative care programs, and the discussion of "dying with dignity" is still uncomfortable for so many (and, in many cases, avoided altogether). Why?

I don't understand why consumers are the one population not included in any significant discussion about healthcare reform. And then once enacted,

they (we) are left adrift when it comes to communicating its implementation. How many physicians have taken the time to explain that with Patient Centered Medical Homes their patients may need to get used to seeing multiple members of a healthcare team and not solely their doctor? Or that personal health information may be shared among providers? We are in the midst of great change in national healthcare policy, yet poll after poll indicates that consumers and employers alike don't understand what is going on. Don't we have a responsibility?

These five are only a sampling of what puzzles me about our puzzling industry. They puzzled me a year ago and, sadly, I have no great optimism that they won't puzzle me a year from now. I guess I only know what I know.



By  
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