

CEO Viewpoint

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Talk about good timing. In 2009, when Mark Laney, MD, arrived as president and CEO of Heartland Health in St. Joseph, Mo., Heartland won the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award and the Foster G. McGaw Prize, one of the most respected community-service honors in healthcare. “It was an amazing year. It’s like we won the World Series and Super Bowl all in the same year,” says Laney, acknowledging an encore may present a challenge. “We’re working on some great things,” he says, while crediting others. “These two awards represent a decade of focused and disciplined effort.” Laney, 53, was born and raised in Denton, Texas, north of Dallas/Fort Worth, where his family distinguished itself over several generations. His grandfather was president of the University of North Texas in Denton, where Laney’s brother is professor and where he received his undergraduate degree in biology. After earning his medical degree from the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston, he worked in pediatrics at Arkansas Children’s Hospital in Little Rock, where he met his wife MaryMargaret, a nurse, with whom he has a daughter who’s a high-school senior. Following Arkansas Children’s, Laney spent three years at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn., in pediatric neurology, a stint that left him with an abiding sense of patient primacy and team medicine. He joined a private pediatric practice in Fort Worth in 1989, eventually becoming president of a large multi-specialty group practice there previous to his taking the top job at Heartland.

What are the top two or three issues you face as CEO of Heartland Health?

We’re one of 24 organizations selected by Premier to be in their ACO pilot and we’re consumed by putting an ACO infrastructure in place. It’s been very challenging and more complex than we anticipated.

Also, we’re struggling like a lot of places to improve throughput and patient satisfaction in our emergency department. With the economy down more people are coming into our ED.

A third issue is more unique to our location: Heartland is facing huge challenges with mental health patients. Missouri has closed several state mental health clinics and we’re seeing a huge number of mental health patients taking ED beds for up to 10 hours while we search for appropriate sites for their care. It’s a bad mix. We’re looking at care for mental health patients not just in the ED but across the continuum, across the community.



MARK LANEY, MD, PRESIDENT AND
CEO, HEARTLAND HEALTH

Will these issues change under the healthcare reform act?

Potentially if more patients have insurance and can access a medical home then those patients won’t feel like they have to go the ED.

What elements of healthcare reform act do you feel are valuable?

The ACO concept could be very valuable as a mechanism to beat the cost curve by using a shared-savings model and an emphasis

on wellness. Also, the Affordable Care Act has provisions to eliminate bias against pre-existing conditions, which helps people who have previously battled cancer, for example.

What elements of healthcare reform act do you feel are overreaching?

The expansion of Medicaid is a two-sided coin. Medicaid already fails to cover cost, so you’re given insurance but it’s underinsurance and individuals will struggle to find a primary care doctor and a medical home. Most state

budgets are in disarray and they'll be facing additional costs for Medicaid.

Can you identify two or three benefits that IT has had on your organization?

We use Cerner for our EHR and because Cerner is based in nearby Kansas City we have a unique relationship, a true partnership. We're constantly on the telephone helping each other. I think it's been a primary reason why we've achieved the top decile in quality and safety.

What do you believe are the most significant near-term challenges that could be addressed by enabling Information Technologies?

IT plays a huge role in being able to execute key elements of an ACO initiative, including population management, and tying together aspects of primary care like hospice, nursing home, outpatient—the ability for all providers to play out of the same playbook.

This year for the first time more than half our revenue came from the outpatient world rather than the inpatient world. We'll see that shift continue, and technology will enable more and more care at home. It's a new world.

What has been the biggest change you have seen in healthcare over your career?

One is technology. Imaging, minimally invasive surgery and IT have totally changed the delivery of care. A second change has been watching physicians move from mom-and-pop practices to joining large groups. That's a truly amazing change over a career—to see the employment model completely change.

What is the best piece of advice you've ever been given?

Doctors make terrible employees but great partners. Our mantra is 'Physician led, professionally managed.' From

me to the COO and to every clinic we pair a physician leader with an administrator. We get physician input at all divisions and for all of our service lines.

We're starting to see a break nationally as more and more physicians become CEOs of hospitals and health systems. Four or five were named in the past year. If you get the right person it can really work well, especially as almost everything depends on getting physicians to collaborate.

What advice would you give to a young person seeking to enter the healthcare field?

I'd make two points: One, healthcare still remains the most noble of all professions. There's nothing more sacred. Two, if you're going to enter healthcare, don't do it primarily for financial reasons; it's a demanding, challenging and stressful job. If you're going to sign up, do it for the right reasons: you want to serve; you have the heart for service.

What is your favorite part of the work you do?

The best thing is being able to lead change that focuses on the needs of patients and the people we serve. To take a large group of people, see beyond the horizon and then to get people to walk with you toward that goal. There's nothing better.

If you weren't running Heartland Health, what would you be doing?

I'd be a college professor like my brother, teaching and being with young people.

What is the best book you have read recently?

In the last year I read a book entitled "Radical, Loving Care," from which I developed a series of lessons for management. It talks about the non-technical side of healthcare that's so important to the healing experience.

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