

CEO Viewpoint

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Every Thursday evening for eight weeks this summer Gary Gottlieb, MD, and his wife Derri Shtasel, MD, both psychiatrists, settled in at home to watch their favorite TV show. You'd hardly call it escapist TV, but "Boston Med," the eight-hour ABC documentary series about caregivers and patients at Massachusetts General Hospital, Brigham and Women's Hospital and Children's Hospital Boston, is as compelling as TV gets.

The riveting reality drama has special significance for Gottlieb because Mass General and Brigham and Women's are flagship academic medical centers for Partners HealthCare, the Boston-based non-profit health system of which he became president and CEO in January 2010. As one of the most respected health systems in the country, Partners doesn't need a TV show to be famous. Besides the two academic medical centers which founded Partners in 1994, it includes community and specialty hospitals, community health centers, a physician network, home health and long-term care services and other entities, and is a major teaching affiliate of Harvard Medical School.

Born in Brooklyn, NY, and raised on Long Island, Gottlieb received his BS from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and his MD from the Albany Medical College of Union University in a six-year accelerated biomedical program. He completed his internship and residency and served as chief resident at NYU/Bellevue Medical Center. In 1983 he arrived at the University of Pennsylvania as a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Clinical Scholar and earned an MBA in healthcare administration from Wharton, an experience that instilled in him an interest in health policy and management. Gottlieb went on to establish Penn Medical Center's first program in geriatric psychiatry. Prior to taking the top job at Partners, he served as president of Brigham and Women's/Faulkner Hospitals. He is also a professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School. He and Derri have two adult children, a son and a daughter.

What are the top issues you face as president and CEO of Partners HealthCare?

The top priority is to nurture and support our mission and allow it to thrive in the context of substantial changes in health-care delivery. Broader coverage, the aging of the population and sustained constriction of the economy will mean that we will be taking care of more people, older people and more patients with chronic illness with shrinking resources. The government and private payers will expect us to



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do better and do more with considerably less. This will require greater innovation and accountability.

Will these issues change under the healthcare reform act?

They'll change a little bit in the short run. There will be market shifts which will catalyze new models of service delivery. That will accelerate movement to a more rational payment model and create substantial changes.

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

Number one, increased coverage. But we can't assume the newly insured will get the prevention and wellness care they need. Many healthcare institutions need to move from an illness system to one that embraces prevention and promotes health. Also, major elements of healthcare need to move toward population-based care and improved coordination of services.

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

We've been fortunate to have benefited from an environment of innovation and thoughtful leadership. For years we've been an IT environment supportive of quality and efficiency. The benefits begin with connecting the members of our medical staff. One hundred percent of Partners' clinicians use the EHR, which includes components like CPOE, bar coding, eMAR, smart pumps and the ability to share digitized images. We've been sharing information and evidence-based knowledge with the help of decision-support tools to reduce transcription costs and errors and reconcile use of medications between in-patient and outpatient settings. IT has helped us also use guidelines to manage diabetics and CHF patients, eliminate use of redundant tests and manage radiology images and information.

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

The ability to reduce the fragmentation of care is most important. Even today's tests are repeated unnecessarily. IT allows us to reduce visits by remotely sharing information and cutting down on the costs of care.

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

Through innovations and improvements in care, people in our ICUs today weren't able to survive even 10 or 15 years ago, now they are able to be treated and stabilized through new protocols and medications. We were first able to stabilize AMI and now cancers. That is a remarkable change.

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

The world is yours. There couldn't be a better field than healthcare. My wife and I were watching Boston Med last night and the nurse highlighted shared a story about how privileged we are to care for patients. My wife reminded me that we've both been doctors for 30 years, since 1979. It's just a remarkable privilege we have in caring for patients, whether you're in dietary, management, IT, molecular biology or at the bedside. For young people entering the healthcare field today, they have an opportunity to make change.

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What is your favorite part of the work you do?

Nurturing younger people, those people who can make us better than we were before.

If you weren't running Partners HealthCare, what would you be doing?

I'm a geriatric psychiatrist so I'd be treating older people facing the problems of cognitive impairment and tremendous loss. I'm a doctor at the end of a day and I'd be providing care.



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