

The U.S. has fantastic health care, the problem is....

In part 1 of an executive interview series, CEO and physician Wyatt Decker discusses his perspectives on today's challenges and opportunities for reinventing health care.

IMAGINE THIS SCENARIO: there are 200 people in a room and each person has a serious health condition. Cost is not a barrier to each of these people receiving their prescribed treatment. A question is asked — how many of you would book a flight to a different country to get your care? You guessed it. No hands go up.

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Dr. Wyatt Decker is chief executive officer of OptumHealth and an emergency medicine physician who brings more than two decades of service within the Mayo Clinic. He held dual roles as chief medical information officer for Mayo Clinic and CEO of Mayo Clinic in Arizona. Dr. Decker often conducts this experiment with audiences to underscore the quality of care delivered in the United States. We often hear about the problems of health care. No doubt, there are deep and serious problems. However, in scenarios like the one above, we understand that the quality of care delivered by our nation's physicians is among the finest available. So why do we hear so much about what's wrong?

According to Dr. Decker, the real opportunities for reinventing health care lie in improving system access, increasing affordability and meeting consumer preferences. "All of these things really require us to think deeply about how health care is delivered and how can we do it better," he says.

In part 1 of a recent conversation, Dr. Decker shares lessons learned and offers his perspective on where today's health care executives and clinical leaders should focus.

What is your take on the state of the health care industry today? What challenges are driving the need to rethink health care systems and delivery?

THE CHALLENGE OF HEALTH CARE ACCESS:

"People want to get to a doctor or a health care team and they can't. Either because they are underinsured or they don't have the financial resources. They don't know where to go or sometimes there just aren't enough doctors or the right type of doctor, whether it's primary care or a specialist available in their area to see."

THE CHALLENGE OF HEALTH CARE AFFORDABILITY:

"We hear a lot about affordability of health care and out-of-pocket cost can be very high, but also the health care system itself is very expensive. So how do we make it more affordable for large employers, individuals, consumers and even the government itself? Can we get on a more sustainable path?"

THE CHALLENGE OF CONSUMER PREFERENCES:

“Most people who’ve experienced the health care system feel that it isn’t focused around their needs, schedules or preferences. We’re entering an era where in most other industries there’s lots of personalization and consumer focus. Health care has been very slow to evolve. We need to make it an experience where people feel appreciated, valued and respected. Not just that they’re getting great quality care, but also that their preferences and needs are being met.”

“Our nation’s care providers are deeply committed and among the best-trained in the world. But I also see them in a system that is struggling. Emergency departments are, at times, the last resort for people who lack resources and access to care. I’ve seen patients struggle to manage chronic conditions without the right support and how the absence of good guidance can create confusion.”

Clearly, the need to reinvent in all aspects of health care is top of mind for many. But it can be difficult to figure out where to start. Can you discuss where you think it’s smart for leaders to focus?

“We should all be thinking about how we drive towards a health care system that really creates and adds value to people’s lives,” says Dr. Decker. Here’s his advice on key areas of focus.

PAYMENT MODELS:

“Move towards payment models that actually reward the correct behaviors in health care. What do I mean by that? The pay-per-value model — rewarding groups of providers to keep people well and healthy — is far more powerful than the traditional fee-for-service model.”

LOCAL ECOSYSTEMS:

“Recognize that health care is local. It’s important to create ecosystems that deliver great, connected care for individuals throughout the health spectrum. This means the patient and their health data move seamlessly between specialists, hospitals, ambulatory care centers, and so on. These kinds of networks and interoperability of data is crucial to create a successful health care system.”

SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH:

“Health care outcomes are driven not only by the quality and capabilities of the health care provider, but also by social determinants of health. Good health care addresses things like access to good nutrition, social connections, transportation and more that can limit the ability for a person to get and stay healthy. For example, in-home health visits to help patients who have difficulty traveling or easily obtained referrals to social and community services can really enable success.”

From your perspective, what could health care reinvention mean to a patient, provider or health plan?

TO PATIENTS:

“It means a health care system where instead of waiting for something to go wrong, there is a team helping you proactively flourish and be healthy. It means a simple phone call or an app or a video chat could advise you on when you might be at risk of developing a serious condition before you develop it. It means a system that is always there for you, almost like a guardian angel. It helps you navigate the system and your journey towards health and wellness. It means all of this in a health care system that is easy to access, affordable, high-quality and compassionate.”

TO PROVIDERS:

“Providers have high rates of frustration and even burnout with their own profession. Reinvention looks to reduce the very heavy clerical burden driving these trends. Doctors today spend about two hours of clerical and non-visit care for every hour of direct patient care that they provide. However, when you talk to doctors, they find the most fulfillment in engaging directly with patients and making a difference in their care. Reinvention means relieving exhausted providers of administrative and clerical duties that don’t bring enjoyment or result in improved care and outcomes.”

TO HEALTH PLANS:

“Health plans are frustrated because they pay for a lot of care that evidence shows doesn’t improve outcomes or help patients on their journey to health and wellness. Payers are happy to pay for health care if it’s necessary. But it doesn’t make sense to pay for care that doesn’t add value. Reinvention means reducing this financial waste to bring down the cost of coverage for everyone.”

“We have an opportunity now to make the health care system work better for everyone. Improve access and affordability for patients, allow doctors to spend more time with patients, and increase efficiencies within health plans. There’s an opportunity to help people connect the dots and get everyone working together.”

You’ve been a practicing physician and a business leader. Tell us the lessons learned from this unique vantage point.

“I have spent most of my career as a practicing physician in busy, level 1 trauma centers and emergency departments. In that environment, you see health care at its finest and also how the health system can be challenging. I think in amazement of the times I’ve seen teams of people — multiple physicians, nurses and technicians — come together as one unit to save someone from a major trauma. I also have great admiration for the persistence of doctors who save lives by diagnosing life-threatening conditions through nuanced symptoms.

I’m a deep believer that in health care, we need to place the patient at the center of everything we do. I always remind young doctors and medical students...imagine for a moment that your patient is you or a loved one. You’d want the doctor to listen and explain things in a

compassionate and thoughtful manner. You’d want them to be focused. You’d want them to recognize your unique history and what’s important to you. The notion of putting the patient at the center of everything is something that I have carried with me throughout my career. I have also dedicated myself to developing better models of care and systems that allow doctors and care teams to function seamlessly, be high-performing and deliver great outcomes for patients.”

“I have an appreciation for how powerful it can be when you work to reduce waste, create care that’s efficient and care that is patient-focused. Today I’m focused on an interesting juxtaposition — creating the right mix of scalable innovations that help our whole nation succeed in health care while also improving the personal and individual patient health care experience.”

CLICK HERE FOR PART 2

of this executive interview series to learn more about Dr. Wyatt Decker’s perspectives on the intersection of technology and health care, the human impact of transformation and physician burn-out.



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