Health Attitude

by John R. Patrick

It's not disease, dollars or doctors standing in the way of safe and affordable healthcare. A new health attitude for patients, providers, payers and policymakers is the solution.

Serving on the board of a community teaching hospital was an eye opener. I saw two different worlds. The hospital is a community asset with a deep commitment to caring for the sick. On the other hand, hospitals and physicians lagged at adopting information technology, and I was appalled at the needless complexity of healthcare delivery processes. Compared to the Internet-connected world of business I came from, I found the healthcare system to be archaic. Paper and post-its were everywhere. Information systems were not integrated. Physicians could not easily share information about patients, even within the same hospital. The lingua franca of healthcare was the fax machine. I decided to go back to school and learn more about the healthcare industry. I studied healthcare for three and a half years and earned a doctorate in health administration.

I wrote *Health Attitude: Unraveling and Solving the Complexities of Healthcare* with a goal to increase understanding and change attitudes about our healthcare system. In my research for the book, I found that the problems in our healthcare system were worse than I thought. I also found that the solutions are closer than I thought. I took a close look at the cultural, attitudinal and technological barriers holding back the United States from becoming a more affordable, accessible and effective healthcare system.

American healthcare expenditures per person are more than double other developed countries. Fraud exceeds $50 billion annually. Unnecessary tests and procedures cost more than $500 billion per year. Despite having the most expensive healthcare in the world, Americans do not always get better health outcomes and the care we receive is not always safe. The lack of information sharing between hospitals, specialists and primary care doctors is a major problem. Healthcare complexity is overwhelming. We have no transparency to the price we pay for healthcare services. Unlike everything we buy online, there is little comparison-shopping for healthcare. Uninsured Americans receive expensive emergency care and limited preventive care.

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Fortunately, there are solutions to the many problems in our healthcare system. They fall into three broad categories: attitude, technology and policy. Consumers need an attitude of taking responsibility for their health and collaborating with providers to get the best care. Providers need a new attitude that puts the patient at the center of care. The Affordable Care Act has numerous reforms that will change provider attitudes. The new Accountable Care Organizations (ACOs) include fixed payments per person and new incentives. The ACOs will lead to an attitude that focuses on wellness, not sickness.

Consumer technology, including FitBit, Apple Watch and a plethora of consumer electronic devices and smartphone apps, will empower us to perform self-diagnosis. The new technology will not eliminate doctors, but will make them more productive and us more healthy. Electronic health records will enable providers to share information and collaborate on our behalf. Big data and analytics will help researchers and providers focus on population health. By analyzing populations, providers will be able to develop new clinics and cures that will lower the cost of healthcare and lead to better outcomes. Robots will be an asset for home healthcare. 3-D printing will lead to cures not previously possible, ultimately printing organs for thousands who are waiting for transplants.

Policy changes are needed to expand the availability of health insurance to the entire population. We are the only country in the world that does not do this. To be competitive in the global economy, we need to have a healthy and productive population. The cost to do this is far less than the amount we are currently wasting.

Health Attitude is available in local bookstores and at Amazon.com in paperback, Kindle and Audible formats.

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