

# PAYERS & PROVIDERS

CALIFORNIA EDITION

## Moving From Questions To Actions *Revamping Healthcare Takes More Than Hypotheticals*

Historians love to amuse themselves with the “what if” game. What if the Union had not held at Gettysburg? What if Kennedy had not gone to Dallas? What if Nixon had burned the tapes?

The “what ifs” can be played in the field of medicine as well. What if the importance of clean drinking water was not recognized in the late 1800s? What if Alexander Fleming had not discovered penicillin by accident? What if a Boston dentist had not discovered anesthesia? The wrong answers to these “what ifs” would return us to the dark ages.

There is a story about a lost traveler who pulls up to a local farmer asking how to get to a certain village. The farmer tells him “if I were you, I wouldn’t start from here.”

Like it or not, “here” is where we are starting from when we try to fix what’s broken in healthcare. And that, of course, brings us to the “what ifs.”

What if, as an industry, we did a better job of addressing the appalling number of patients who die in hospitals every year due to medical errors? What if more people in our industry enthusiastically supported the move to transparency rather than clinging to a past that is already dying?

What if the public better understood that “more is better” isn’t always the case, for when it comes to healthcare such thinking can be just as dangerous as believing that “less is best.” What if more healthcare professionals were willing to challenge their previous assumptions and acknowledged that there is more than one path to healing? And what if we stopped focusing the bulk of our nation’s healthcare resources from admission from discharge given that we live most of our lives from discharge to admission?

What if health plans had not gone down the wrong road of selling their products as a cost-saving strategy, but instead talked about it as a model designed to improve health with cost savings simply being a residual benefit? What if so many of our elected officials didn’t practice finger in the wind politics when it comes to something as important as healthcare and what if physicians didn’t need to worry about living in such a litigious society?

What if dying patients were allowed to live out their last days with the poise, dignity and respect that they’ve earned over a lifetime? What if more hospital boards of trustees insisted on a policy of truthfulness

and candor as a corridor to building public trust? And what if healthcare was truly placed on the bottom shelf where everyone could reach it?

No one who has ever worked in healthcare doesn’t have his or her own list of “what ifs.” Yet the issue today isn’t so much “what if,” but “what now?”

Just as so many of our other amenities and institutions are being rethought, so too healthcare’s very role in society is under the microscope. How care is paid for, the function of government, the right to die, the role of technology, how we guarantee patient safety, how access is assured, how quality is measured and how children learn to eat properly are all issues which the industry must now confront.

Those in leadership can best meet these challenges by demonstrating a quality of will and temper of imagination that turns “what ifs” into “why nots” and allows a new better healthcare to take its rightful place as a leader in 21st century America.



**By  
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