

The experts weigh in on health care reform.

By Rhoda Weiss

What are the greatest challenges facing your health care organization in an era of reform and uncertainty?

How will leading health care execs face the challenges ahead?

What role does marketing play in meeting those challenges?

As provisions of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act begin their multiyear phase-in, health care executives are clamoring to ensure their organizations not only survive but thrive in this era of reform and uncertainty. While reform helps close the health coverage gap for the uninsured, gets us closer to ensuring health care for all and improves access to care, the challenges ahead for health care organizations are daunting. Inadequate reimbursement; lack of access to capital to support quality, facility upgrades and technology; and escalating costs of drugs, staffing and procedures are key culprits. To learn how the nation's best-known health systems define these challenges and involve their marketing teams in the solutions, *Marketing Health Services* queried renowned CEOs associated with members of our esteemed editorial board.



George C. Halvorson
Chairman and CEO
Kaiser Permanente
Oakland, Calif.

Greatest challenge:

The greatest challenge is to take advantage of the new tools for care improvement and use these tools to truly improve quality and outcomes. Access to absolutely current advances in medical science and best practices coupled with significant progress in data availability and connectivity offer all of us who provide health care services a new path to finally join the continuous improvement revolution that has taken over just about every other industry. This is a great time to be in health care.

Role of Marketing:

Marketing will play a huge role in the next wave of health care reform because the opportunities will finally exist to compete based on care outcomes and care quality. Consumers will choose to get their care from organizations with higher success rates and lower death rates. Those kinds of choices will be available over the next couple of years in the health care purchasing market. That will be good for the best care teams and even better for the patients.

3

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4



Ronald R. Peterson
President
The Johns Hopkins Hospital and Health System
Executive Vice President
Johns Hopkins Medicine
Baltimore

Greatest challenge:

We remain very concerned about hospital and physician reimbursement. However, we do feel that the new law complements our already strong efforts in managing high-risk patients while operating under tight expense controls. And because we have one of the largest primary care networks in the region, we are well poised to serve a portion of the 32 million individuals who will become insured under the legislation.

Role of Marketing:

We view marketing and public relations as a way to educate our audiences about access to quality health care and engage our patients in their own care to improve health and outcomes. Our reach is regional, national and international, so we've focused on innovations in digital, online and print media that reach many households in a cost-effective way. Our marketing and communication team is a key player in helping us to assess environmental changes and focus our strategies for the future.



Deborah A. Proctor
President and CEO
St. Joseph Health System
Orange, Calif.

Greatest challenge:

Health care reform will challenge us in so many ways that we simply cannot be reactive in determining our response. We believe the health systems that ultimately thrive will view upcoming changes not as happening to them, but as catalysts for developing new strategies that fulfill their communities' health care needs. Working in partnership with the community, physicians, employees and other stakeholders, hospitals have a unique opportunity to lead the way in redefining how we will deliver care that is high-quality, accessible and provided with dignity for all.

Role of Marketing:

Once an organization has identified its business strategy, marketing must step in to ensure the strategy resonates with consumers and other stakeholders. However, we are not in an era of business as usual, especially not for marketers. In this new era, marketers will be challenged to think beyond traditional hospital marketing. Health care marketers must focus on helping the consumer make the right connections with providers in the community. The most successful will find ways to make these connections have lasting benefit.



Karolee M. Sowle, FACHE
President and CEO
Desert Regional Medical Center/Tenet
Palm Springs, Calif.

Greatest challenge:

As in any time of uncertainty, the greatest challenge is getting it right for the future. A hospital's success is largely guided by its ability to work well with its physicians, made especially difficult due to misaligned financial incentives in the marketplace. With universal coverage comes the need to reduce the nation's cost of providing care. To do this, providers are going to have to align in new ways.

Role of Marketing:

Marketing is the face and voice of mission and strategy both internally and externally. At a time of change and uncertainty, direct and frequent communication is the first priority. At a time of cost constraint, classic marketing must become more focused, with careful thought to the medium, and demonstrate ROI. Marketing a new collaboration among providers under reform will require an orientation new to most providers.



Nancy M. Schlichting
President and CEO
Henry Ford Health System
Detroit

Greatest challenge:

One of the greatest challenges we face is the financial strain caused by reduced Medicare payments, especially prior to 2014. At the same time, we must move ahead with new partnerships between physicians and our health system that promote integration for improved quality and simplify care processes across the continuum. It is critical to focus on these major issues. Yet we must continue to engage customers, while creating a positive and energizing work environment to attract and retain the highest-quality health care professionals.

Role of Marketing:

Marketing must possess a high level of understanding of customer needs and desires, and must design, implement and promote products and services to meet—and exceed—these expectations. Marketing can help address the challenges we face by anticipating competitive responses and providing a proactive, metrics-driven model for strategy effectiveness. It is imperative to integrate marketing strategic thought and process into all leadership planning.



Lloyd H. Dean
President and CEO
Catholic Healthcare West
San Francisco

Greatest challenge:

The greatest challenge Catholic Healthcare West faces today is performing well even as we transform to become part of America's new reformed system. We must provide quality care and remain strong in today's fee-for-service system even as those models evolve around us. Consumers and payors rightly expect that reform will improve outcomes and contain costs, and expect those results in the near term. As providers, we must meet their expectations in both today's reality and tomorrow's.

Role of Marketing:

Health care organizations are evolving to better integrate their services across the full spectrum of care. In an integrated care delivery model, effective marketing is not only essential for growth, it is an integral part of how the organization engages patients in taking responsibility for their own health maintenance and appropriately accessing services. Strategic marketing and communication must facilitate a dialogue through which the provider better understands community needs and responds to them.

5



Michael C. Tarwater
CEO
Carolinas HealthCare System
Charlotte, N.C.

Greatest challenge:

The uncertainty itself is our greatest challenge. What we know about reform is dwarfed by what we do not know. Generally speaking, a secondary concern is the ability to care for a significantly expanded number of insured patients, many of whom are proposed to be covered by Medicaid's already strained resources. The fear is the expectation that we must treat more with the same number of dollars—or fewer.

Role of Marketing:

The greatest role of marketing and public relations is that of keeping the special nature of the organization alive and in the right light of the community it serves. It involves keeping an organization relevant—positioned in the community's mind as a unique and indispensable contributor to health—and not allowing a commoditized view. It is about ensuring patient engagement and an enduring connection to the organization.



Glenn D. Steele, MD, Ph.D.
President and CEO
Geisinger Health System
Danville, Pa.

Greatest challenge:

We are challenged by the uncertainties of reform, a perverse payment system that rewards units of work not outcomes, reimbursement shortfalls and the need to do more with less. We meet these challenges by developing innovative solutions designed to change the payment system and by eliminating unjustified variations and fragmentation in patient care. The key is providing appropriate care, increasing efficiency, and utilizing resources wisely and in the best interests of our patients.

Role of Marketing:

Marketing and public relations play an important role in communicating health reform issues, promoting much-needed changes, and educating patients and members so they understand that solving national challenges requires changing the way we deliver and pay for care. Our public relations and marketing staff helps translate Geisinger's work as a high-performing health system so that all audiences understand the benefits offered by our truly integrated health care services organization.

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