Foreword

Several years back, I wrote an article for HealthLeaders Extra called, “Are You Ready for Big-Box Healthcare?” In that article I postulated that retail healthcare (or as some call it, retail medicine) would prove to be a significantly disruptive force in the hospital and health system sector of the industry. Specifically, I spoke to the rise of convenient care clinics in retail settings, and how that trend would augur seismic change in the field. That day has arrived, and both the history of the movement and the market implications are well-chronicled and astutely dissected in this timely book by Dr. Amer Kaissi. This is not only a thoroughly researched book about a formidable competitive movement in healthcare, it is an insightful text on the sweeping changes that have already altered the market landscape, and will continue to radically modify the nature of health care delivery in America. Consequently, this is a necessity ready for anyone who is serious about navigating/leading organizations in a consumer-driven, post-ACA world.

As noted throughout this book, we are in the throes of change that this industry has not experienced in its long and somewhat staid history. The fundamental delivery model of today – to a large extent – looks much like the delivery construct of decades ago. However, with the successful introduction of insurance exchanges – both public and private – the basic economic architecture of health care is shifting from third-party financing (either employers or government) with remotely engaged consumers/patients to direct, line-of-sight accountability and involvement by the end users, namely the consumers/patients. We are – in the language of the pundits who monitor such things – moving away from defined benefit to defined contribution. As Dr. Ezekiel Emmanuel recently predicted, “By 2025, fewer than 20% of workers in the private sector will receive traditional employer-sponsored insurance.” That is a dramatic modification of our current framework, and represents nothing short of a tectonic change for this industry, with monumental implications on how health leaders manage the operational and financial aspects of the business. Phrased another way, exchanges change everything.

Unfortunately, many people within our industry have allowed political dynamics to cloud and obscure their view of market realities. In so doing, they have missed -- or are missing -- the broader trends that have been in motion for years. In focusing narrowly on the polemics and polarization surrounding the introduction and implementation of the Affordable Care Act and its cornerstone component -- health insurance exchanges/marketplaces -- they have missed the sweeping movement toward rising consumerism and increasing retail orientation. And that represents a major managerial misstep.

Yet, as Dr. Kaissi articulately outlines in this book, the movement toward a retail orientation has been in play for many years, as evidenced by the remarkable growth and performance of convenient care clinics, urgent care centers, retail clinics, and so forth. These enterprises basically represent a move away from the traditional delivery framework toward a model which offers increased access, heightened convenience, lower prices, improved service, and generally predictable outcomes. They are --to sum it
up – the embodiment of a consumer-oriented construct, and as such and are the hard-wired harbingers of a sweeping movement that will alter the entire landscape of health care as we know it today.

To that end then, those who read this book should not only appreciate the significance of this operational facet of a “new-world delivery model,” but should pull up and recognize this movement for what it is, namely an element of a much larger trend. Health care – finally and fittingly – is poised to enter the market-driven realm in which virtually every other industry in America operates; a place where convenience matters, service is key, prices are transparent, value is paramount, and the consumers are in charge. As some who have awaited this moment for decades would say, “it’s about time.”

American health care is far from optimal. It is expensive, it is complex, it is difficult to navigate, and it produces outcomes that consistently lag behind those of most developed nations. Yet, perhaps the basis for an anecdote is on the horizon. There is an adage in marketing parlance, “the customer is always right.” As we move toward a retail-oriented, consumer-driven model that adage may well be the core component of a prescription that introduces economic involvement and end-user engagement as much-needed medicine for the world’s largest health care system. If that is the case, this book is a valuable and timely read in better understanding the basic ingredients of that operational prescription.

Preston Gee  
Christus Health, USA

Preston Gee is the Vice President of Strategic Marketing for Christus Health in Dallas, Texas, where he oversees the marketing function for the system. Gee is a recognized thought leader in the health industry, particularly in the areas of consumer-driven health care, service line strategy, and most recently in the realm of health insurance exchanges/marketplaces. Over the course of his career, Gee has published numerous articles on planning and strategy for virtually every major publication in the health care industry. He is a frequent speaker on current trends and emerging strategies. He is the author or co-author of several books on strategy and service line management. His latest book, The Service Line Solution: Melding Population Health with Rising Consumerism, will be published in January of 2014. His career includes SVP of Strategic Planning and Marketing at Trinity Health, Senior Director at Phase 2 Consulting in Austin, Texas, and SVP of Strategic Planning for St. David’s Health System in Austin. Gee started his career with The Quaker Oats Company in marketing and new product development. He holds a BS and MBA degrees from Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, and is a past recipient of Modern Healthcare’s “Up and Comer’s Award.”