Foreword

Over my years in healthcare management, research and education as a CEO, professor and public policy participant, it has become clear to me that information and insights from multiple sources are the key to success—if they can be effectively captured, integrated, and managed. However we have often isolated aspects of this to individual functional areas—information technology, transaction systems, archival/retrieval systems, market research and intelligence, research and development, and the like. The Epilogue to this book describes a family tree of related approaches. Yet it is the sum total, integrated in some way, that creates competitive advantage and intellectual property for the organization and produces community benefit to society as a whole. Knowledge management is our best attempt yet to provide that level of integration and, thus, to realize the latent value in our organizations and systems.

This book builds an extensive conceptual framework for integration across all of the contributing fields. The scope of topics is large but appropriate ranging from the philosophical nature of science (Chapter 4) to consideration of information processing and interpretation models (Chapter 6) to conceptual and empirical studies of applications in health (Sections 3 and 4). Here the reader can gain the base necessary to appreciate and develop a meaningful approach to knowledge management in healthcare operations.

Yet the value of the book for me lies in the foundation it provides for much broader applications. My current professional concerns regarding quality as a board member of the Joint Commission mesh with my ongoing focus on payment, insurance, and economic value in health services. From this perspective, it is obvious to me that quality must become a core management objective and its metrics, a central measure of organizational success on a par with financial viability indicators. Likewise payment systems that recognize patient outcomes and satisfaction as well as processes and protocols force organizations to think across traditional functional boarders. Yet we tend to measure and manage quality, finance, and market attractiveness in
separate silos. We often have great stores of knowledge in fragmented form but fail to manage it effectively towards broader objectives.

In this world, knowledge management, as presented here, offers a way to cross the boundaries of function and organization. It provides a core management tool for survival and prosperity, not only for organizations but also for whole health systems. This book is not a detailed handbook to achieve this but a precursor that points the way for its audience in organizing and understanding the elements of emerging knowledge management in healthcare operations. It provides a solid foundation for those wishing to realize the promise.

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November 25, 2008

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