

FOUR WAYS SAN DIEGO'S PHYSICIAN LEADERS WILL HELP OUR COMMUNITY THRIVE IN THE YEARS AHEAD

by Sherry Nooravi, PsyD

CHANGE IS THE NEW NORMAL in healthcare. From the Affordable Care Act, to how Medicare pays physicians and hospitals, to exciting technological developments like telemedicine that will allow us to receive care by logging in online or visiting a kiosk.

The seven physician leaders interviewed for this series have a vision of success and are taking key steps to get their teams and our community there. Four key themes emerged for how they keep up with and thrive during this time of change and evolution: 1. They are intentional about how they shape their organizational cultures and engage their staff, consulting physicians and patients; 2. They are patient-focused; 3. They manage the way change is introduced and implemented; and 4. They seek to learn, grow, and stay updated. Leaders of other industries should heed their advice as it is applicable in more than just the complex world of healthcare.

Organizational culture, also known as “How things are done around here,” consists of group norms of behavior and the underlying shared values that help keep those norms in place. According to Edgar Schein, leaders shape and drive culture by what they pay attention to, how they react to crises, what they role model, how they reward staff, how they bring people into the organization, and how they exit them. Every company has its own way of doing things, from how they make decisions, treat customers, develop (or not develop) their staff and so forth that influences culture. What the physician leaders in this study shared clearly indicates that they are crystal clear on what it takes to drive an engaging culture.

#1 They Are Intentional About How They Engage Their Teams

They drive the behaviors and culture they want, and a key phrase that came up was the importance of “walking the talk.” Dr. Paul Bernstein, Medical Director and Chief of Staff at Kaiser Permanente, has a hands-on, open-door policy and shares that one should lead by example from your clinical practice, to your work ethic, to how engaged you are for your physicians. “Influence is communicating well and focusing on patients. Engaging physicians happens by driving patient-focused care, creating a ‘yes’ culture and ‘yes’ philosophy.”

Dr. Tom Moore, CEO of UCSD Family Practice, believes in “walking the talk” and having a willingness to speak up if something is not right, even if it means calling out colleagues’ errors or oversights, especially among those who refer to them. “We need to have the courage to identify shortcomings in outcomes in a respectful but honest way, and that includes our own performance.” When these types of behaviors are role-modeled from the leaders, it helps increase the engagement of staff.

According to Kevin Kruse, author of *Employee Engagement 2.0*, employee engagement is defined as the emotional commitment the employee has to the organization and its goals. Engaged employees work on behalf of the organization’s goals and they use discretionary effort, also known as “going the extra mile” and the “secret sauce.”

Ways to engage staff include initiating activities to boost the mood and interac-

tions of the environment. Dr. Wendy Buchi, CEO of IGO Medical Group, stays up to date with what companies like Google, Pirch, and Apple do and applies it to engaging her staff from employee appreciation days, to paying for education, to team spirit Fridays when staff can wear Padres or Chargers shirts to show their San Diego spirit.

Another way the leaders of Kaiser Permanente and Sharp HealthCare drive their culture is through events and frequent communication. Dr. Bernstein shared that he reinforces the culture at different levels from weekly physician summary emails, to three-minute podcasts, to attending big group meetings, events, and new physician orientations. Dr. Steven Green, CMO of Sharp Rees-Stealy Medical Group, shared that hosting annual educational retreats and dinner events is useful for helping people feel like they are a part of something. He shared that Sharp HealthCare has an all-physician assembly with videos of patient stories, speakers, and discussion of what’s up and coming. “It reminds people why they are here when we share stories of successes that have changed people’s lives.”

The intentional ways these physicians drive culture starts with their mindset and consistency in their actions. Successful companies we know, such as Southwest Airlines¹, Starbucks², Container Store³, and Whole Foods⁴, attribute much of their success to their company culture. These companies consistently engage employees through clear communication on their strategy and values, invest in employee development, and create positive work environments. This focus on culture is not only good for employees and customers, it impacts the bottom line. A Kenexa 2008 study of 64 organizations found that companies with highly engaged employees achieve twice the annual net income of companies whose employees are less than highly engaged⁵.

#2 The Patient Is the Center of Their Worlds

A large part of driving the culture for these leaders is to be patient-focused, a mindset and way of leading that drives excellent patient care. “The superpower of the physician is the relationship and connection to the patient. We are the most intensely connected to the patient, and that is the physician leader’s superpower and how we’ll make changes to the system.” This statement by Dr. James LaBelle, CMO of Scripps Health, captured the sentiment of the physician leaders.

Dr. Green recommended setting one’s schedule around what will be easiest for

the patient. “Does the patient need to see me versus email or call me? Over 100,000 of our patients are using our email portal, and this can be a great way to provide care. With email, you see what is going on in the patient’s own words.”

This view was reflected in Dr. Bernstein’s view on patients, and he advised other physicians to “focus on medicine as a profession and not as a job. It’s about a calling — caring and how you make patients feel. When someone leaves your office, it’s how you make them feel that they’ll remember, your compassion.”

#3 They Drive Change With Care

Dr. Mihir Parikh, medical director of NVISION Laser Eye Centers in La Jolla and president of the San Diego County Medical Society, believes in the importance of driving change by sharing a common goal.

“First, I learn who my audience is, and I take the time to listen to their concerns and ideas, both individually and as a group. Second, I’ll learn what their strengths and weaknesses are and how I can help them work toward their goals and the organization’s goals.”

Dr. John Jenrette, CEO of Sharp Community Medical Group, shared that he drives change by helping others understand the journey and how decisions were made. “If you start at the end and people have not been part of the journey, you lose them.”

During times when melding two practices and cultures, he recommends referring back to the common vision, the greater good, and giving the team permission to think and speak differently. “It definitely takes time, effort, relationship building, and a healthy dose of collaboration to change a culture. If you try to change culture by issuing marching orders, you may feel successful in the short term, but I guarantee when you revisit it, this perceived cultural change will be undermined and not a reality.”

#4 Change Is Coming and We Need to Prepare

The theme of embracing change can easily be applied in different industries. In the words of Dr. Parikh, “In the next 10 years, there will be many new layers of technology, and, as physicians, you don’t want to be the ‘Barnes and Noble’ practice.” He advised that rather than commiserating and complaining with one’s colleagues, one can take a proactive approach and talk to the leaders of innovative healthcare solutions, band with colleagues in

your mode of practice, join CMA and AMA, and participate in the political process.

Dr. Jenrette also encourages getting involved and educated to broaden your horizon and scope of knowledge outside of your clinical practice. “In doing so, one usually will be more open and react more favorably to change or challenges.”

Kaiser Permanente serves patients in innovative ways from having a futuristic kiosk in the lobby of the County of San Diego campus in addition to two Target stores with nurse practitioners, and a virtual exam room with biometric equipment to virtually consult with a physician when needed.

Dr. Bernstein shared that we must embrace change, as the only thing certain is uncertainty. Abraham Lincoln’s belief that “the only way to predict the future is to create it” is a mindset that can drive success in the evolving healthcare industry or any other business. **SDP**



Dr. Nooravi is an organizational psychologist and CEO of Strategy Meets Performance, a leadership consulting firm that focuses on helping CEOs of fast-growth companies shape engaging, innovative, and customer-driven cultures through executive coaching and senior team facilitation. She has been named “Trailblazer of the Year” for her research on the best practices of CEOs of high performing organizations. She can be reached at sherry@strategymeetsperformance.com or at (312) 286-0325.

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PHYSICIAN LEADERS INTERVIEWED



◀ Dr. Paul Bernstein, Medical Director and Chief of Staff, Kaiser Permanente



◀ Dr. Wendy Buchi, CEO, IGO Medical Group



◀ Dr. Steven Green, CMO, Sharp Rees-Stealy Medical Group



◀ Dr. John Jenrette, CEO, Sharp Community Medical Group



◀ Dr. James LaBelle, CMO, Scripps Health



◀ Dr. Tom Moore, CEO, UCSD Family Practice



◀ Dr. Mihir Parikh, Medical Director of NVISION Laser Eye Centers, La Jolla, and President of the San Diego County Medical Society.