Hospitals and Health Systems in the United States: Challenges for Today and Opportunities for Tomorrow

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As we gathered in November for the World Hospital Congress in Muscat, Oman, and looked at how hospitals and health systems may change in 10 years, we were reminded that what unites us as members of the International Hospital Federation is our shared vision for a world of healthy communities where all individuals reach their highest potential for health.

We all have similar goals, and we all are working to be more efficient, to manage the total cost of care, improve quality, save lives, and advance health in our countries ... and across the world.

Another quality we share: we all face a number of challenges in delivering care in our respective countries ... some similar and some different.

In the United States, consumer preferences are continuing to transform our field. Individuals want affordable, convenient, personalized, high-quality care that provides more value. They want to engage in ways that make sense in today's digital world.

Innovations such as technological advancements and data analytics have the opportunity to reduce costs, improve care and reduce friction for the consumer. This will require us to expand our digital infrastructure, including broadband internet access, to make sure all our patients can benefit from these advancements.

Moreover, chronic disease management continues to challenge our health care system, including addiction and the opioid crisis, as well as an aging population.

As we look out over the next ten years, we recognize that these challenges are actually opportunities to improve care, and America's hospitals and health systems are seizing them so we can build an even better health system — and a brighter future — for our patients.

This means a system that focuses on promoting wellness ... but also provides the best care in the world when you are sick. This means a system where care is convenient — where everyone can get care when and where they want it — with same day appointments and prompt walk-in care, without having to wait in emergency departments for minor ailments and injuries.

This means a health care system that is seamless — with people to guide handoffs and provide coordination — where medical records and information flow easily, with appropriate protections for privacy. This means a system that allows patients to get test results as rapidly as possible to reduce worries and anxiety. And this means a system where patients are taken care of by people who operate as teams ... and have pride and joy in the work they do.

America's hospitals and health system are working to create a system that looks just like this... for today and ten years from now.

Some are partnering to use new technologies to better manage data, expand access to care and make it easier for providers to spend less time on paperwork and more time with patients. Others are partnering directly with local employers and other community organizations to provide care. And some are creating organized networks of caring to ensure and even expand access in the community, outside their four walls, through increasing access points, mobile services and even home visits. Some are doing all of the above.

While the future looks bright, we will always face challenges.

This is why the IHF is so important: it brings us all together to share knowledge, expertise and experiences so we can improve health across the world. We all have the chance to contribute our learnings and to learn from each other so we can all meet the challenges we face as health care changes.

The good news is these changes do not scare us. In health care, “change” means the opportunity to improve. “Change” means better care for our patients. “Change” is just what hospitals and health systems do — and have been doing — for far longer than any of us have been around.

We will keep innovating and adapting to changes in health care; keep working to help our members transform for the future; and keep working with IHF and our partner countries to address challenges so we can continue to advance health in the United States ... and across the world.

About the American Hospital Association

The American Hospital Association (AHA) is the national organization that represents and serves all types of hospitals, health care networks, and their patients and communities. Nearly 5,000 hospitals, health care systems, networks, other providers of care and 43,000 individual members come together to form the AHA.

Through our representation and advocacy activities, AHA ensures that members’ perspectives and needs are heard and addressed in national health policy development, legislative and regulatory debates, and judicial matters. Our advocacy efforts include the legislative and executive branches and include the legislative and regulatory arenas.

Founded in 1898, the AHA provides education for health care leaders and is a source of information on health care issues and trends.