

The U.S. has fantastic health care, the problem is....

In part 2 of an executive interview series, CEO and physician Wyatt Decker discusses his perspectives on today's challenges and opportunities for reinventing health care.

IMAGINE THIS SCENARIO: there are 200 people in a room and each person has a serious health condition. Cost is not a barrier to each of these people receiving their prescribed treatment. A question is asked — how many of you would book a flight to a different country to get your care? You guessed it. No hands go up.

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Dr. Wyatt Decker is chief executive officer of OptumHealth and an emergency medicine physician who brings more than two decades of service within the Mayo Clinic. He held dual roles as chief medical information officer for Mayo Clinic and CEO of Mayo Clinic in Arizona. Dr. Decker often conducts this experiment with audiences to underscore the quality of care delivered in the United States. We often hear about the problems of health care. No doubt, there are deep and serious problems. However, in scenarios like the one above, we understand that the quality of care delivered by our nation's physicians is among the finest available. So why do we hear so much about what's wrong?

According to Dr. Decker, the real opportunities for reinventing health care lie in improving system access, increasing affordability and meeting consumer preferences. "All of these things really require us to think deeply about how health care is delivered and how can we do it better," he says.

In part 2 of this recent conversation, Dr. Decker shares perspectives on the intersection of technology and health care, the human impact of health care re-invention and physician burn-out.

One of the challenges we continue to see play out are different views in health care about how technology and data should be applied to health care. Can you help us understand where you think the opportunities lie?

"I am excited about the intersection of technology and health care. For the last 10 years, technology has been improving. However, for a variety of reasons — privacy and complexity are top among those — health care has not gotten to the place that most other industries have. We are now in a golden era of having digital tools and services that help providers deliver much more efficient care and help people manage their health and wellness more easily."

“The opportunities I see are in the development of new tools that help health care consumers manage and engage with their health care. For example, an app that helps consumers manage personal wellness goals and engage directly with a health care system — who to see, when to see them, and how it gets covered. I also think we can leverage the individual health record. We want health care consumers to have — right on their phone — the ability to view prescriptions and engagements across multiple health systems and provider types. Bringing together this information has been historically very hard but has great benefits. For example, primary care providers are able to see if prescriptions have been filled or if someone is seeking health care at other physicians. They can more effectively manage that patient’s care. Leveraging technology to address care in the appropriate care setting — remotely in the home or over the phone, for example — can also help make health care more accessible and affordable.”

Your comments today have raised the idea of finding real focus while still aspiring to achieve large-scale transformation. Can you talk a bit about how we find our purpose as well? What does it all mean on a human level?

“We want to create an environment where when a person needs that personal touch, we make that very easy for them. This could be face-to-face in an office or it could be a phone conversation with a nurse or advanced practitioner who guides care. If someone has a serious medical condition, we want individuals to be able to text or have a brief conversation with clinicians they have an established rapport with. Using tools like the individual health record allow us to not spend a great deal of time just covering the basics and really focus on the questions, concerns, and worries of the patient.”

“To me, that’s the great opportunity here and we’ve shown an ability to do this already in OptumCare practices. We do this through a focus on value — doing the right care, at the right time, and at the right place — and being very efficient in reducing waste.”

“Health care is a deeply personal and individual endeavor. I like to say to my colleagues that the most important distance in medicine is the last three feet. The last three feet is the distance between the provider and the patient. We need to always remember that health care requires empathy, kindness and human touch. That is not something to displace with technology but something we are striving to enhance. Sometimes that is counterintuitive and people worry about a world that’s impersonal.”

How can we reinvent the system to help clinicians regain enjoyment in their profession?

“Nationally it’s been estimated that as many as 50% of our nation’s licensed physicians are burned out — meaning they’re deeply frustrated with the practice of medicine that they’re engaged in. We’re committed to addressing this and bringing the satisfaction of practicing medicine back to all providers. The question becomes ‘How do we do that?’ We know most providers are happiest when they’re engaging with their patients and the clerical or administrative burden is the frustration.

“With this in mind, we are continuing to expand efforts to reduce clerical burden and get providers back to doing the work that they love. It’s why they went to medical school and have worked hard — so that they could be of service to their patient. We see doctors enjoying their work again when even small parts of the clerical duty are minimized. The other way we look to improve the physician experience is leveraging value-based care. Doctors find it deeply rewarding when they see the right things happening around them and they’re part of a system that works.

“We aim to be a national example of how to help providers get back to really enjoying their work, practicing at the top of their license and focusing on areas where they have the most impact.”

We all need inspiration for change. What would you leave us with?

“When I look across the landscape of health care today, I urge us to be restless in our pursuit of transformation and to continue challenging the status quo.

“All across the health industry and in every health system, there are wonderful examples of great, compassionate care. We need to find those examples, elevate them and provide that service at scale. We will strive to build practices that embrace efficiency and patient-centeredness. We will strive to help providers provide outstanding care. We will strive to help providers provide outstanding care. We will strive to create tools for people to manage their health and wellness in ways they enjoy and benefit from.

“On my personal journey, I couldn’t be happier to be in a position to really move the dial on health care in ways that truly matter to our country. I hope we all aim to contribute to the betterment of the U.S. health care system through being a shining example of how great, valuable, effective and efficient care can be delivered.”

MISSED PART 1 OF THIS EXECUTIVE INTERVIEW SERIES?

[READ NOW](#) to learn about Dr. Wyatt Decker’s perspectives on the state and challenges of the health care industry, where it’s smart for leaders to focus, what change means for different stakeholders across health care and lessons learned from a physician executive.



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