

CENTRAL VALLEY BUSINESS JOURNAL | Health Care

Community Health Forum focuses on fixing healthcare locally

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STOCKTON — Industry experts, county and state officials and educators gathered Nov. 15 at University of the Pacific to tackle a sickness plaguing the entire nation: problems in healthcare.

The Community Health Forum specifically addressed how to make healthcare more affordable while improving the quality of care to Central Valley residents.

“The one big bang solution doesn’t necessarily exist,” said Amy Shin, CEO of the Health Plan of San Joaquin. “I think there has to be improvement in many areas. One of the things I’m going to be advocating today is how do we address the waste in health care and the administrative burden.”

Shin believes those are costs in health care that should be minimized or eliminated as much as possible, which could free up the needed funds to help bring other costs under control.

“Of course, that’s my very optimistic view, but I think there’s something there that we should at least try to research and come up with small solutions,” Shin said.

San Joaquin County Supervisor Chuck Winn touched on the all-too-common issue of physician shortage, highlighting local education and retention as a possible solution.

Winn said healthcare and educational institutions, as well as other organizations from across the county have worked together to solve the problem of coupling local graduates with local job vacancies.

“It is a collaboration of effort of all entities to come together with one focus, as opposed to doing this — what normally happens is we pass each other, not having a communication or a connection between the different groups,” Winn said. “If we can really merge our educational institutions and develop curriculum to provide the applicants that are qualified to work in our healthcare facilities, that will be a major accomplishment.”



From left, keynote speaker Ian Morrison conducts a panel discussion with Amy Shin, Sanjay Marwaha, MD, Daniel Wolcott and Mike Letizia at the Community Health Forum on Nov. 15.

The keynote speaker, noted author and futurist Ian Morrison, echoed Winn’s sentiment in his address to the few hundred in attendance.

“We’ve got a wealth of new graduates,” Morrison said. He has heard from hospitals from around the country stating that there is a need for skilled workers to fill critical gaps. “As a community, certainly the types of initiatives you’re working on are crucially important.”

Morrison highlighted the success of the Affordable Care Act, or Obamacare as it’s informally called, stating that since its inception California has seen a decline in the

uninsured in the state. What once was 17 percent is now 7 percent statewide. The majority of other states have seen similar decreases.

One of the biggest problems, Morrison pointed out, was the affordability of health insurance. The average annual median income is about \$57,000. The average annual median health coverage plan is \$18,600.

“The average American family cannot afford the average health insurance premium,” Morrison said. “Think about that for eight nanoseconds. That’s a wee bit of a problem.”

Morrison jokingly offered one solution to reducing health coverage costs.

“The toughest thing is to make insurance cheaper. How do you make insurance cheaper? The simplest way I know is to leave out sick people,” Morrison joked. “The real key is who you cover, what you cover it for and how much you pay

providers. That’s what determines the cost of health insurance.”

Finding a solution comes down to looking at the socially determining factors behind why certain populations are more apt to go to the doctor repeatedly than others. Lower income has a lot to do with it, which comes back to adequate job training and reaching people as they graduate.

A panel of four area healthcare and employment experts, moderated by Morrison, chimed in on problems and solutions, and how those could be fixed locally.

The panelists included Shin, Sanjay Marwaha, MD, physician-in-chief for the Permanente Medical Group, Daniel Wolcott, CEO of Adventist Health Lodi Memorial, and Mike Letizia, owner and consultant with Letizia HR Solutions.

One of the highlights of the discussion revolved around the uncertainty coming out of Washington, D.C., regarding Repeal and Replace legislation of Obamacare that the Republican Party has been vehemently pursuing, and how local leaders are dealing with the uncertainty.

“There’s great concern on the part of small employers. Many of them are calendar-year employers, and employers would love the opportunity to plan in advance,” Letizia said. “When you’re looking at the kind of cost associated with healthcare, that is a major part of your operating capital. Not to know what to expect and go with the flow is very scary.”

Letizia said the best small business can do is to take things one step at a time and hope for common sense. He said employers want to be able to provide health insurance because a healthy workforce means a more

> A CLOSER LOOK

Fix it locally: Work together

Here is a list Morrison provided on ways to fix healthcare locally:

- Work together
- Learn from each other
- Leverage relationships with bigger partners, especially managed Medicaid plans, counties, AMCs and integrated delivery systems
- Focus on heavy users
- Go upstream to social determinants of health, e.g., whole-person care
- Leverage and coordinate all the social spending levers
- Knock down categorical and bureaucratic barriers
- Never give up

productive and stable workforce. But, he pointed out, small business still needs to pay things like payroll and other operating costs.

“(The uncertainty) creates a huge amount of incapacity to do long-range planning in terms of what we believe the market is going to look like,” Wolcott said. “(Adventist Health) is dedicated in the underinsured, underpaid, lower-than-cost markets — Medi-Cal and Medicare — our health system is investing in that from a risk vantage point, because we believe that’s where we can make a difference in the communities we serve.”

Where many systems are budgeting for increased costs and cutting where they can, Kaiser has been able to expand their offerings due to an integrative model of healthcare delivery.

“Our focus is to pay attention to costs, and to make sure that whatever systems we’re doing, we’re doing better. How are we eliminating waste? How do we reduce the turnover time in the operating room, but with the same number of people? In essence, do more with the same amount of fuel,” Marwaha said. “There’s a lot of concern about the payer system, and I don’t want to take away or diminish that, but we have a national problem with the delivery system. If we don’t figure that out, then we won’t be successful as a country at managing healthcare costs.” **CV**

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Ian Morrison
Keynote speaker,
Community Health Forum