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PNN Interview: Dr. Marc Sedwitz, XiMed Board Chair, on Medicine, Past, Present and Future



In a recent interview with PNN, Dr. Marc Sedwitz, a practicing vascular surgeon who serves as chairman of the board for XiMED Medical Group, said that, as long as he can remember, doctors have always worried about the cost of medicine. And, while it is a very difficult time, no matter how beaten up doctors feel, "as long as they get up every morning and feel calm in their lives, their personal lives, their professional lives, they will never have to worry about the politics or what insurance companies do. They will be fine."

"I came out of training in 1983, and for the past 30 years there has always been something worrying doctors," he said. HMOs scared everybody back then, but it waxes and wanes what people are willing to pay. In good times people say they don't want to have an HMO, and in bad or uncertain economic times the first thing people do is they want to pay the least amount for healthcare, he noted.

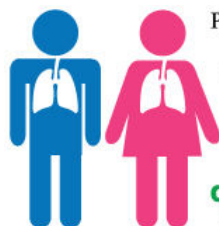
"Even though people want excellent care, the cost is the driving force," Dr. Sedwitz said. "That's how Sharp and Kaiser have become so successful at getting a big market share." Those who are fundamentally healthy will choose hospitals that will do an OK job because they don't think they really need them. On the other hand, places like Scripps, which has a good reputation on the clinical side, will attract those who need high-level medical care, cardiovascular, spine, neurosurgery, for example," Dr. Sedwitz said.

He gave the example of Kaiser contracting with Scripps doctors for heart surgeries as a good use of resources and an effective collaboration, which he said he wishes there was more of. Physicians at different hospitals deliver great care, but it is such a shame that hospitals, for the most part, compete for patients and compete on cost, he said.

DELIVERING GREAT CARE

Ultimately every doctor wants to deliver great care and to have a relationship with his or her patients because it is all about people, about connecting, not about spending time on paperwork. Physicians want to teach patients about what is going on, what is happening to them; we want to have patients trust us, and we have that need to connect, he said, "even if we don't have the best bedside manners!"

"The hard part of finding yourself in your 60s in medicine," he said, "is that one, your career disappears quickly; two, much of it is a blur; and



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three, you realize how hard you were working 20 years ago and how hard you still need to work now," he said. There are just not enough doctors. He said he used to have four partners, and now it is just he and his one partner who cover two hospitals, Scripps Memorial and Scripps Encinitas, 24/7, all year-round.

Medicine has become so much more difficult, he said. You have a shrinking pool of dollars going for physician reimbursement as opposed to administrative costs for hospitals and insurance costs. "There are more rituals and protocols, variables to measure, so much more paperwork. That's why you have more happy employed doctors and many more unhappy private doctors. Running a practice is so much more difficult than it was."

When asked if he himself would ever consider being employed, Dr. Sedwitz answered yes. "And the reason [physicians] would consider [it] is because there is very little control over the quality of life that you have." He said everyone wants to give up the administration of practice "because it is the hardest thing we do. It is easier to collect a paycheck for a lot of doctors. You look at new people coming out of training. They have debt, and they don't want to go into more debt buying a practice."

PHYSICIAN REFORM

He said he has been doing it for a long time, and he scratches his head wondering who is going to get up at 2 in the morning in the future to take care of a ruptured aneurism or acute trauma patient. Insurance reimbursement has changed so much, said Dr. Sedwitz, "the only way you can be compensated enough for doing it is if hospitals will pay for it." He said hospitals pay stipends to doctors to be on call 24 hours a day because insurance reimbursement is not enough.

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) was signed in 2010, the era of insurance reform. The era we are in now is "physician reform," he said, which is how you are going to pay physicians to do the work that they do. And it is going to be very different. The concept of fee for service is going away, he said.

At 62 years old, Dr. Sedwitz said it helps him to look back and try to put things in perspective. "Doctors are very simple people. They need to create an environment they can enjoy," he said. "Do no harm! Take care of the patient! It is very simple stuff. And we do it every day. And even when sometimes we don't like what is happening, we still do it."

When asked about his hobbies, he said, "At age 50 I ran marathons, I climbed Mount Whitney, did all the 'big' events, and then I hit 60 and something happened — I didn't have to prove it anymore. I am satisfied being who I am, being in my skin."

He said that he loves to ski, snowboard, swim, go hiking, ride his bike and do all the outdoor things one can enjoy in California.