

FORTUNE BRAINSTORM HEALTH

The Hospital's Role in Community Health and Equity

SUMMARY OF FORTUNE VIRTUAL DISCUSSION

AUGUST 13

In partnership with **IBM Watson Health**

Though numerous hospital performance measurements and ranking systems exist, none take into account a hospital's impact on community health and equity. But according to Dr. Kyu Rhee, Chief Health Officer at IBM Watson Health, the health system must go beyond the shift from volume-based care to value-based care and [focus on values-based care](#). As we adapt to a post COVID-19 world, our panelists discussed the need for our systems to align with the values we want to live by.



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– Barbie Robinson

Over the course of a fruitful hour-long discussion, our panelists revealed practical ways for hospitals and health care systems to undertake this shift. In fact, as Dr. Rachel Thornton, Associate Director for Policy, Johns Hopkins Center for Health Equity tells us, many hospitals are already implementing strong community health programs.

Dr. Thornton introduced to us a joint initiative from John's Hopkins Center for Health Equity, The Bloomberg American Health Initiative and IBM Watson Health. Their goal is to measure hospital contributions to its surrounding community, such as increased life expectancy and prevention of hospitalization. The measure is currently [open for public comment](#) to gather feedback from the public as well as hospitals themselves. Evidence-based metrics provide a roadmap for hospitals to improve the health of surrounding neighborhoods. Dr. Rhee put it succinctly, "We do what we measure."

What specifically can hospitals do to better integrate into the community, and uplift the public health of its constituents? For one, financial incentives to care for public health can go a long way. Dr. Josh Sharfstein, Vice Dean for Public Health at Johns Hopkins, elaborated on Maryland's move to a global budget which allowed hospitals to broaden their focus. Hospital CEOs and CFOs reported to Dr. Sharfstein that, with global budgets, they began to partner more with the community to prevent hospitalization, rather than the status quo, which was to treat as many patients as possible. However, he warns that "the incentives alone are not enough. It's important to have knowledge and partners."

Here, community health workers play a vital role. Barbie Robinson, Department of Health Services Director for Sonoma County, CA,

has found that integrating hospital care and discharge planning with the everyday work of general practitioners and pharmacists is key to ensuring a patient is not readmitted. "Collaboration without integration is... another form of fragmentation," she explained. To that end, she emphasized the importance of social determinants of health, which is what her department has been focused on.

Dr. Rhee agreed, noting that community health workers are essential to brokering trust with the community. Furthering this point, Dr. John Westfall, Director of the Robert Graham Center, asked us to consider how many hospital executives know people in the community. He believes that C-Suite executives should go out into the neighborhood and get to know the issues facing the people in the immediate vicinity of the hospital.

Ms. Robinson left us with this poignant insight: "We all know that poverty and lack of opportunity... are negative externalities on the market." Every company, not just health care companies, can positively influence public health. There is an economic case to be made, according to Robinson, for companies to be invested in improving the social determinants of health for the good of us all.



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– Dr. Kyu Rhee

"In the age of COVID, every company recognizes that they are a health company, and they have a responsibility to public health," Dr. Rhee added. Our panelists reached a strong consensus regarding our collective responsibility in addressing the social determinants of health. As a first step, Dr. Westfall recommended reaching out to your local public health department. Certainly, we have learned from the COVID-19 pandemic that this grave issue affects us all.



For more information and ideas on how to improve community health, please visit



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