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Health Care

Pandemic brought changes that are here to stay

In this week's Thought Leadership Roundtable, experts at Business Furniture + Co. and Indiana Wesleyan University discuss how the pandemic forced lasting changes in health care delivery and facilities.

Q: How is health care and the delivery of care being reimagined post-pandemic in ways that will benefit patients/consumers?

Penny Callaway: Post-pandemic, the health care landscape continues to undergo transformative shifts in health care delivery. Key emerging components are flexibility in access and patient-centered approaches.

Perhaps the most notable aspect post-pandemic is the routine integration of telehealth and digital solutions into health care delivery. This integration facilitates remote consultations and continuous monitoring, particularly benefiting patients in rural areas.

Higher education plays a pivotal role in this reimagining process. At Indiana Wesleyan University, we are leveraging our expertise in health care education and incorporating into our curriculum information derived from the pandemic. One example is our emphasis on holistic care that encompasses physical, mental, and spiritual well-being, enabling our graduates to champion preventive care and wellness programs and create adaptable, resilient health care delivery systems.

Mary Beth Oakes: "Hospitality" is a big buzz word in designing health care facilities. There's now more focus on the patient experience, and there's more intentionality around design. We

know that the design of health care spaces can impact one's perception of the level of care. The spaces are being reimagined from the traditional institutional aesthetic, with more focus on the experience the space creates for caretakers and families.

Q: How is health care being reimagined after the pandemic in ways that will benefit providers?

Mary Beth Oakes: The pandemic proved to be an extreme pressure test on the entire health care system. What's happening now is purposeful, human-centered design. Our partners in the health care world saw clinician burnout at rapid rates during the pandemic. The leaders of health care facilities are beginning to demand efficient layouts and configurations that help people do their jobs but also provide spaces for respites and breaks. There's also a focus on flexibility, providing spaces that work for today but can be reconfigured for what's next.

Penny Callaway: The pandemic was so difficult for everyone, including health care providers. Moving forward, however, the post-pandemic reimagining of health care and its delivery could hold significant benefits for providers.

Further integration of advanced technology to streamline administrative tasks could reduce burnout among health care professionals. Implementing efficient systems allows providers to concentrate more on patient care and less on administrative burdens, contributing to overall job satisfaction.

Institutions of higher education that specialize in nursing and mental health education have an opportunity to play a pivotal role in this paradigm shift. IWU, for example, intentionally addresses burnout among health care providers who are also students. This educational approach covers not only the technical aspects of health care but also focuses on the mental and emotional well-being of providers, recognizing the importance of their overall satisfaction and fulfillment in their roles.

Q: What are some of the biggest trends in the design of health care spaces, and how do those changes affect patient care?

Penny Callaway: The integration of technology into health care spaces is a prominent trend. Remote monitoring is one way that technology integration can enhance patient care. This tech-driven approach can allow for more timely and individualized health care solutions. Many people are surprised to learn that this and other technological integrations are associated with improved health outcomes.

Patient-centered design is another significant trend. This philosophy recognizes the importance of tailoring environments to meet patients' unique needs, prioritizing comfort, privacy, and accessibility. This concept extends beyond the physical confines. The inclusion of personalized medicine, genetic testing, and lifestyle-focused wellness programs in health plans reflects a similar, albeit broader, patient-centered approach to health care.

Mary Beth Oakes: Health care designs are seeing a shift from the sterile environments of the past. Physical space has an important real-world impact on patients and staff. There's a new need for empathetic design—a space that feels like home can be comforting to patients in an anxious time. Design is also critical to facilitating better communication between patients, families, and providers. Creating environments that reflect the patient's preferences and values can enhance their overall experience.

Today most health care facilities are built with fixed components, such as permanent walls and millwork. That can make it hard to change a space quickly. This is where height-adjustable desks, moveable screens, and furniture on casters can provide needed flexibility. With flexible design, even a café space can be changed into a training room.

Q: How can innovations in health care and health care settings address mental health challenges, and what role can the health care system play in increasing access to mental health services?

Mary Beth Oakes: Poorly designed spaces can affect the perception of quality of care. This can be true for both patients and providers. We



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love the current trend of creating “neighborhoods” in the workplace in both corporate and health care environments. It allows people to be together and also find nearby places for solitude. It fosters a sense of belonging and connection between patients and staff—preventing burnout and helping with mental health challenges.

Penny Callaway: Once again, the integration of technology emerges as an obvious but powerful tool to enhance accessibility to mental health services. Telepsychiatry and virtual mental health platforms facilitate remote consultations, breaking down geographical barriers and increasing reach. Ideally, technology, including telemedicine consultations, health-tracking apps for preventive care, and AI-driven tools for personalized health recommendations will also be incorporated into employee benefit packages, maximizing their usage.

IWU’s advanced practice nursing and counseling programs collaborate to train mental health professionals, helping to meet the escalating demand for mental health support.

Q: How might advancements in robotics and automation revolutionize health care delivery?

Penny Callaway: Advancements in robotics and automation are poised to revolutionize health care delivery, ushering in a new era of precision and efficiency.

Benefits include the implementation of robotic surgery and AI-assisted diagnostics, which enable precise and efficient care. Robotics in surgery can enhance precision, reduce invasiveness, and promote quicker recovery times. Additionally, AI-assisted diagnostics can provide health care professionals with valuable insights, supporting accurate and timely decision-making.

While embracing these advancements, it is crucial that health care providers understand

the importance of maintaining the human touch in patient interactions. The personal and empathetic aspects of health care must not be compromised, and providers must be equipped with the skills to balance technological expertise with compassionate patient care.

IWU integrates technology into our nursing and counseling programs, but we also model and teach the art of health care because we know the human touch remains indispensable in fostering trust, communication, and emotional support for patients.

Mary Beth Oakes: Robots are fascinating to me and the way they’re impacting space design at hospitals.

They are playing an important role in surgical settings and in rehabilitation and mobility. But robots are showing up in other areas, from the hospital ward to inpatient pharmacy. As robots get “smarter,” we may see more robots in the emergency department or the ICU.

They align with the needs for virtual and hybrid care as well.

Whether we are for or against robot assistance in health care, we will all likely encounter them in future health care experiences.

Q: Work is more remote and more globalized than ever. How can the health care system be effective in such a multigenerational, geographically diverse workforce?

Mary Beth Oakes: The small silver lining of COVID-19 was the shift it caused in how health care is delivered, with a bigger emphasis on virtual delivery. A good example of virtual care is a pilot being pursued by the Veterans Administration called ATLAS, or Accessing Telehealth through Local Area Stations. The pilot focused on getting better care to rural veterans, who account for nearly a third of all veterans and have a harder time traveling to VA hospitals, which tend to be in larger cities. A rural veteran who can’t travel

long distances might be forced to use a local health care system that isn’t as prepared to work with veterans. The virtual care solution offers all types of care—from primary care check-ups, to physical therapy to hearing checks and hearing-aid fittings. I think we will continue to see primary care and chronic care move away from centralized care facilities and move into spaces nearer the patient or in the patient’s home, which will more easily serve different age groups wherever they may be.

Penny Callaway: It is critical for remote workers to have comprehensive health care benefits that offer flexible health insurance options, allow the usage of telemedicine services, and provide resources for mental health support. Collaborative efforts between employers and virtual health care providers will enhance the accessibility of remote health care, ensuring that employees can access necessary services irrespective of their geographical location. Younger workers may have different values, priorities, and expectations for health care. Cultural competency is essential training for health care providers as they provide health care to the diverse needs of employees from various age groups.

Q: What are your top recommendations for improving care and access to care in Indiana?

Penny Callaway: Improving care in Indiana is heavily dependent on improving access to care. This will necessitate exploration and investment in new approaches and technology, such as telehealth services and the internet access required to utilize telehealth. Many Indiana residents cannot access high-speed internet and must travel over an hour to health care appointments. This is a significant barrier to quality care. Additionally, increased access to and coverage for integrative health care holds promise. Integrative care combines conventional medical treatments with complementary and alternative therapies, focusing on treating the whole person—mind, body, and spirit.

At IWU, we are committed to providing innovative education to health care providers who are prepared to positively impact the health of Hoosiers.

Mary Beth Oakes: I believe we can continue to improve health care by making sure that preventative screenings and interventions are available to all members of our community. In addition, by aligning as a community to focus on social determinants, we can significantly improve outcomes. ●



Dr. Penny Callaway is an associate professor of nursing in Indiana Wesleyan University’s Graduate Nursing program. Through more than 25 years of nursing experience, she’s worked in fields such as long-term care, psychiatric care, intensive care, outpatient surgery, and nursing education. She also recently wrote a chapter in Laboratory Screening and Diagnostic Evaluation and currently serves as the content editor for NCLEX-RN for Dummies.



Over more than three decades of experience, **Mary Beth Oakes**, CEO and owner of Business Furniture + Co., has honed her skills in creating thriving workplace cultures. Oakes is proud of BF+C’s designation as a Woman-Owned Business Enterprise and actively mentors women in the workplace. Recognized for her contributions, she received the 2023 Indiana Top 250 Award and the 2017 NAWBO Outstanding Woman Business Owner.



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