Letter to the Editor

Can Amazon and Nursing Save Health Care?

O

n January 30, 2018, the business news wires were buzzing with the news that three corporate behemoths – Amazon, Berkshire Hathaway, and JP Morgan Chase – would form an independent healthcare company to drive down costs for their combined nearly 1 million employees. The news shook Wall Street and sent pharma, insurance, and benefit manager stocks tumbling with the markets responding favorably for the three principles. Though the joint venture’s purpose was thought to be largely aspirational and no details were announced, Amazon’s proven ability to radically change consumer experience suggested just maybe this venture could pull off what our current healthcare system can’t – true clinical and financial transformation.

From delivery by drone to package drop off to the trunks of parked cars, it is clear Amazon has revolutionized the shopping experience. Kaufman Hall’s chairman Ken Kaufman (2018) described the inauguration of the Amazon Go “store of the future” in Seattle. Imagine a shopping experience where you simply scan your Go app and enter through a subway style gate, place your items directly in a shopping bag, and exit the store receiving an electronic receipt before you even get to your car.

The problems Amazon is trying to solve with this new model have some striking similarities to health care: deliver excellence at the lowest possible cost, remove friction from the customer experience, and leverage technology and digitization. Our industry, which is slow to change and, quite frankly, until only recently has experienced success within the existing business model, is prime for this type of external disruption.

This new not-for-profit joint venture is in the process of constructing its leadership team and recently named surgeon, writer, and public health researcher Atul Gawande as CEO. Several other critical executives have been hired though to date nursing is not represented on the team and we are wondering why. We would like to change that; who better than nurses, clearly in partnership with other clinicians and business-minded leaders, understand the needs of consumers, the requirements of care across the continuum, and the inefficiencies in our current systems and processes. We are experts at disrupting the status quo and understand firsthand the importance of developing a strong interprofessional team to confront these challenges. We are currently living with the consequences of a healthcare system where nursing’s voice has not always been well represented or respected. Toward that end, the following letter was sent to Jeff Bezos, CEO of Amazon, expressing the need to having nursing expertise on his team.

Dear Jeff:

We are intrigued by your joint venture with Berkshire Hathaway and JP Morgan Chase to build a new model of health care for your employees. As you assemble your team, we urge you to include the expertise of nurses. Nurses hold a unique understanding of the needs of consumers, patients and providers, the strengths and weaknesses of operational frameworks, and the imperatives for forging effective connections and communication to move patients efficiently through a system. Nurses have critical insights that other healthcare professions do not bring to the table.

Nurses are at the nexus of care, knitting together all the disparate services, whether preventive or acute, in-patient or out-patient, diagnostic or therapeutic. A nurse is at every transition point across the care continuum, bridging services and practitioners to support patients in achieving the best possible outcomes. Other healthcare professionals enter and exit at different points of a patient’s journey. The only professional always present is the nurse.

As you look ahead to rolling out a new system, it is important to note that nurses are also the most trusted healthcare professionals, according to Gallup consumer surveys conducted over the last 16 years. Your employees will have greater faith in a new system knowing nurses were integral to its development and central to its operations.

We would like to discuss embedding nurses on design and development, marketing, service, and support teams. Your joint venture will be the stronger for it.

To date we have not heard back from the Amazon team but hope that by harnessing the collective energy of nursing leaders to change that. Here’s what we encourage to assure nursing’s voice is represented:

• The disruptive forces are coming from outside of health care so it is incumbent on us to be vigilant and proactive. That means we need to read the business news, both empirical and popular, to understand the problems large employers hope to solve as well as the creative forces they intend to deploy to drive down costs and improve access.

• Look to technology to create solutions to solve heretofore impossible problems. For example, if Amazon can deliver packages to cars, might we leverage that technology to deliver groceries in food deserts and finally address one of our most pernicious social issues?

continued on page 199
Can Amazon and Nursing Save Health Care?

continued from page 197

• Get nurses in on the ground floor with companies involved in technology research and development as content experts who can collaborate in building a better mouse trap.

• We must leverage our expertise outside of health care (that’s where the creative solutions are emerging) on boards and advisors to tech companies and creative start-ups.

• Attend conferences or present on panels at healthcare technology events (e.g., StartUp Health, MedCity INVEST, Blueprint Health). In our experience, nurses are rarely represented to bring the patient and nurse’s advocacy voice to the discussion.

Please join us in contacting Jeff Bezos at Amazon and Atul Gawande and let them know we can help to enrich their vision and truly transform health care. Additionally, seek positions on boards or in advisory roles with companies which will no doubt have a substantial impact on the way we care for our patients and communities for years to come.

Beth A. Brooks, PhD, RN, FACHE
Nancy M. Valentine, PhD, MPH, RN, FAAN, FNAP
Therese A. Fitzpatrick, PhD, RN, FAAN

REFERENCE

Kaufman, K. (2018, January 24). The 2018 to-do list for healthcare providers. Kaufman Hall. Retrieved from https://www.kaufmanhall.com/resources/blog/2018-do-list-healthcare-providers?mkt_tok=eyJpIjoiTkVME1EQQNMyMlJpWlRZERYQW51RjIiLm4xT0l0R08zWdQYQmxQXc9UW1wTmJ0Y0dTaVlWittWnRvanlsQzR5OGV3RFJadzNnUFhjK1VQR2hma1ZkK3RaalNzenBjRHpDUk91Uk9tOG82c3jBPSGN1bVwvWEhHTFVlaU9cLy99.