

Tuesday, November 10, 2009

Health care leaders, EMBA members debate health care reform

Oakland University's School of Business Administration's 2009 International Business Conference featured an interactive panel discussion to debate the challenges and opportunities of reform, and included speakers from major hospitals, health insurance companies, research centers and academia.

"At a time when our nation is working on legislation to reform health care, OU's School of Business Administration offered a great opportunity to bring various perspectives from the health care industry into the discussion," said Bassam Nasr, president of Health Care Network and 2007 OU SBA Executive MBA (EMBA) graduate. Nasr served as moderator for the session.

A second session focused on health care posed the question, "Can IT save the health care crisis?" This panel, featuring CIOs, business analysts and educators, was moderated by EMBA student Denis Dudzinski, senior account executive for health care, at Compuware/Covisint.

With current U.S. health care costs reaching \$2 trillion per year, all panelists agreed the nation must develop reforms which provide equal, accessible and affordable health care for all. A consensus fell short, however, when panelists began to debate which types of reforms will reap the best quality outcomes, while reducing costs.

"Primary care, which is patient centered and team based, needs to be a priority," said Ernest Yoder, vice president of medical education and research for St. John Health System, and adjunct faculty for the SBA EMBA program. He believes that the United States needs to look to systems in other countries to find positive options, as well as to learn from the negative outcomes. "Politics and our nation's resistance to change are two major challenges for reform," he added.

Jack Weiner, president and CEO for St. Joseph Mercy Oakland, also shared his concerns about health care challenges, suggesting that a lack of useful data and a standardized method for measuring data makes it difficult for the industry to address geographic and racial inequalities and access problems.

"Consider how we purchase equipment and materials," he said. "As an industry we have never determined our value purchasing strategy – that we collectively want X amount of quality for Y amount of dollars. We do it for every other type of purchase we make such as food, clothing or tires, and yet we do not make this type of decision where it is most important, where it affects life and death decisions."

Some reforms suggested by panelists included reforming medical liability, performing a root cause analysis of system ineffectiveness, expanding health insurance markets, empowering patients to make proper lifestyle choices, bundling professional fees and leadership alignment, and more.

Although the proposed solutions were numerous and complex, panelist moderator Nasr recognized some common ground. "By the time every panelist gave their perspective, it became clear that health care needs reform, that public expectations need to be aligned with economically possible solutions, administrative tasks and costs must be simplified and incentives should be put into place to reward quality not quantity," he said.

Will information technology solve the health care crisis? More specifically will the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), which designates \$38 billion to high tech incentives for health care play a major role in reform? Will the \$19 billion targeted solely on electronic health records (EHRs) be enough incentive for hospitals, and physicians to adequately adopt this technology? During the second health care session, four panelists and several conference participants shared their insights on these important questions.

Paul Peabody, recently retired vice president and CIO, William Beaumont Hospital, describes IT as "the lynchpin for what we will accomplish in the future." He was adamant that the health care industry cannot eliminate waste and fraud without good IT systems in place, but said there is still a long way to go. "Right now, only 17 percent of doctors and 10 percent of hospitals have basic EHR's," Peabody said. "Since the ARRA is an incentive that does not cover complete startup, costs remain an issue. It also requires a process change. If you put a good system on top of a bad process, you get bad results faster. Change management is critical."

Michael Ubl, executive director, Minnesota Health Information Exchange, agreed that the biggest challenge is adoption. "It's not about whether technology will work or not. It will. It's about accepting a new paradigm. It's about doing right by the patient and becoming more patient focused. It means aligning goals and objectives at the leadership level. The patient also needs to change. If we continue to live lifestyles that aren't prudent, our health care problems will continue to exist. The government is betting a lot of money on this. What is fundamental to its success is our ability to change."

Both sessions raised many issues, challenges and proposed solutions to the health care crisis. While many questions remain, all agreed that high-level discussions among industry leaders bring important issues to the forefront and bring a resolution closer to reality. "Celebrating history, successes and highlighting the next challenges is always good for growing organizations," said Nasr. "I liked the opportunity, as an EMBA alumnus, to be part of this. The actual exchange of ideas and knowledge and identifying areas that need further clarification, debate and research is what a university is all about."

The Executive MBA (EMBA) at Oakland University's SBA prepares highly motivated professionals to become dynamic global business leaders. The Executive MBA program is one of very few in the country to offer two different but complementary concentrations in Health Care Management and Information Systems Leadership. "The program is outstanding, not just academically, but in terms of the level of contribution from leadership within health care and IT. It is the access to leadership that has been most impactful to me," Dudzinski added.

The Executive MBA program will hold an information session for prospective students Friday, Nov. 20 at 5:30 p.m. in 238 Elliott Hall. For more information, contact Monica Milczarski at (248) 370-2059 or milczars@oakland.edu. For more information about the program, check the Executive MBA Web site at emba.oakland.edu.

SUMMARY

The Executive MBA at OU's SBA prepares highly motivated professionals to become dynamic global business leaders and promote discussion on topics of global interest.

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