

Tosteson Lecture Series Interview Summary

February 12, 2009

James J. Mongan, MD

President & CEO

Partners HealthCare

Dr. Mongan was featured as the Tosteson Lecture Series speaker on February 12, 2009. His lecture focused on current issues in the finance and delivery of health care, and the importance of developing high performance health systems. Prior to his lecture, Dr. Mongan was kind enough to answer several questions from Brady Evans (HMS 2012) and Gretchen Fuller (HMS 2012) about his opinions on the current health care landscape. The key points from the interview are summarized below. Check out the video footage to learn more.

Q: *What are the biggest challenges facing Partners and other large hospital systems right now?*

A: The need to balance cost and revenue, and rationalizing health care by instituting systems such as electronic medical records and disease management.

Q: *Do you think the average physician working at Partners is affected by these challenges?*

A: Yes, it has the potential to affect everyone, despite the fact that health care is slightly recession-damped as compared to other industries. In addition, physicians should be utilizing electronic health records and disease management systems to contribute to the overall effort of rationalizing health care.

Q: *What policies could be implemented (at the federal, state, or local level) to address these challenges?*

A: We badly need "health reform" and the absolute *sine qua non* is to cover everybody. It doesn't make sense to fix the system for 85% of people and leave the other 15% out. The cost of coverage issue needs to be addressed, an important component of which is reimbursement reform. Addressing these issues will require getting the system more organized and integrated than it has been in the past.

Q: *What changes have you noticed in the health care landscape over the past few years?*

A: One thing that is often skipped over are the scientific and medical advances. The progress of medical science is stunning, and is something to be optimistic about. New drugs and techniques come out each day. On the problematic side, society is unwilling or unable to keep up with the cost of these things.

Q: *What changes do you anticipate that we will see over the next few years?*

A: We probably will see global health reform of the health care system. From a purely analytic point of view, we can do a better job of value in this country. We spend twice as much as the average western country and our results are not any better. We owe it to ourselves and others to remove waste and inefficiency in our system. However, crudely applied cost control measures could do a lot of damage and could hit the less well funded folks first (i.e. Public hospitals before private hospitals, psychiatrists before surgeons). A lot of corollary damage could be done if it is not done carefully.

Stay posted for summaries of the upcoming Tosteson Lecture Series speaker interviews.