SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN HEALTHCARE: MY COMMUNITY DENTAL CENTERS
A PUBLIC/PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP IS SOLVING MICHIGAN RESIDENTS’ DENTAL NEEDS. SEE HOW THE NONPROFIT MY COMMUNITY DENTAL CENTERS HAS FOUND SUCCESS IN AN EVER-CHANGING FIELD.

Is the government the answer to our public health problems? What about the private sector? My Community Dental Centers, a dental support nonprofit based in Michigan, has proven that a public/private partnership can be successful—and potentially replicated across state lines.

Twelve years ago, Northern Michigan had eight dental offices that were operated by the local government. But like many government healthcare programs, it was not self-sustaining and required tax subsidy to provide additional funds to keep the doors open.

As the economy in Michigan took a downturn, the local community was unable to continue to support the dental operations and began looking for alternatives.

Tom Veryser, the founding CEO of Michigan Community Dental Clinics, which became My Community Dental Centers in July of 2016, believed he could make the nonprofit self-sustaining. Relatively small changes were made and two years later, the organization was in the black.

Once those eight offices saw success, other health departments in Michigan wanted to provide similar services. But the model was not ready to provide care on a statewide level. Instead, he formed Michigan Community Dental Clinics as a charter to work with other health departments and open new facilities.

Veryser retired about two years ago, and Gregory Heintschel was chosen to take on the role of President and CEO.

“I had told the board when they brought me in that I didn’t want to just maintain the good work previously done. I wanted to help the company grow,” the 10-year veteran of the company said.

He proved this quickly with a change not only in the scope of care the nonprofit was providing, but but to whom My Community Dental Centers was providing care.
For much of its history, the nonprofit only provided care to the underserved—to patients who didn’t always have the means to pay. But Heintschel knew that in order to grow and serve more people, more revenue was required.

Instead of raising prices, My Community Dental Centers opened its doors to the entire population in the community.

Growth is the main goal of the company’s massive transformative strategy to double in size in five years. Currently, with 34 dental centers in Michigan, My Community Dental Centers is the largest nonprofit dental support organization in the U.S.

But for Heintschel and other leaders at the nonprofit, this isn’t enough.

“When you look at our patient demographic, there are still many patients with unmet needs. That’s why when I joined the board we changed the strategy from one of maintenance to growth, and changed the name of the organization from Michigan Community Dental Health to My Community Dental Centers.”

This is reflective of the nonprofit’s growth strategy, which is looking to cross state lines within the year.

My Community Dental Centers has already done the legwork necessary to begin the move over state boundaries. There are limitations, and the legal framework is different in each state, but being a nonprofit has its advantages.

“We don’t want to spread ourselves too thin, so we’re looking at states around Michigan,” Heintschel said. “Next year we’re looking to be in Indiana. The next two years, Ohio and Illinois.”

Part of the company’s social entrepreneurship strategy centers around looking at the world in a totally different light.

The nonprofit has assembled talented management and leadership teams with decades of experience in the economies and efficiencies of the dental health marketplace. My Community Dental Centers operates as a lean nonprofit, targeting administrative costs and practices by having one administration team cover its 34 offices.

But the mission and vision driving My Community Dental Centers’ growth is based in social entrepreneurship.

“It’s not about improving the wealth of the company,” Heintschel said, “it’s about being agents of change. We’re revolutionizing how dental healthcare is provided to patients, and improving the health of our community.”
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”You know the phrase ‘think outside the box’? For us, there is no box,” he said.

There’s no question that healthcare in the U.S. has undergone incredible change and flux in the last few years, and we’re likely to see just as much change under a new president. Where organizations used to be able to plan for two to five years in the future, long-term business plans are no longer feasible.

In order for My Community Dental Centers and others in the healthcare field to continue seeing success in the coming years, Heintschel recognizes both flexibility and sensitivity to the changing environment will be necessary.

”Dentistry is conservative and slow to change,” he said. “The field has been hurt in the last few years because of this, so we’re trying to mitigate that.”

Attracting and retaining exceptional employees—and paying them a wage above the industry average—and continuing to build a strong culture are focuses of Heintschel and his team. A challenge for the nonprofit, and especially in rural areas in Michigan, is retaining dentists. But Heintschel knows once a member joins their team who’s the right fit, the organization becomes unstoppable.

”No matter how well we do something, there’s always going to be a better way. We don’t settle. Continuous improvement means continuous change.”

”We are accountable for important health services to so many people and organizations: stakeholders, community health departments, the state of Michigan, our fellow employees, even at the dental schools we work with.”

“But we are first and foremost focused on our patients, and making sure our services are not just meeting their needs, but exceed them.”
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