

Oregon Healthcare News

orhcnews.com

Articles, Interviews and Statistics for the Healthcare Executive

Vera Whole Health Offers Employers Transformative Healthcare Delivery

By Peter Li
VP, Marketing & Communications
Vera Whole Health



David Chase, CEO of Avado and frequent contributor to *Forbes Magazine* is fond of calling the healthcare battle a fight between “Transformers and Preservatives.” (See any of his recent articles or this one about Healthcare’s Trillion Dollar Disruption.)

The biggest obstacle to the progress of healthcare Transformers, he says, are the Preservatives – the healthcare incumbents who “protect the status quo” over “improved outcomes,

reduced cost and improved patient experience.”

Those of us at Vera Whole Health like to think of ourselves as Transformers – champions of improved outcomes, reduced cost and improved patient experience. Our model, we believe, is sleek enough to fly under the Preservative radar and effective enough even, to win them over.

Put simply we provide primary care via worksite clinics – owned by the employer, staffed and operated by Vera. Employers pay a small fee per member per month on top of their existing health insurance, giving their employees and their families unlimited access to a full-time medical team (at least one doctor, nurse practitioner, medical assistant and health coach).

When it’s all said and done we typically save a company 10-15% net in healthcare costs in the first year – including the cost to build the clinic.

But the model is a lot more than

providing convenient, affordable, and properly managed care that saves people money. We’re good at making people healthy.

Vera got its start in 2008 as a boutique fitness studio for women. We were the anti-gym, the alternative to paying \$49.99 per month for a membership you never used. Our secret sauce was in how we listened, esteemed and tapped into people’s intrinsic motivation. We trained in the Transtheoretical Model of behavior change and helped our clients see the value of living healthier lifestyles outside our studio.

But try selling boutique fitness and behavior change during a housing market crash – or at any time for that matter. Preservatives laugh you out of the room. We needed a way to promote behavior change and make it available to a larger audience.

Worksite clinics became our Trojan Horse – but unlike a useless, giant, hollow wooden horse our clinics met a desperate need. Employers who had grown used to seeing their

healthcare costs rise every year despite their experience ratings saw how intelligent and accessible primary care could not only boost their bottom line, but make their employees happier and healthier as well.

We had traction finally through effective primary care and behavior change. And that's when we figured out how to build the third leg of the stool.

Through experience we had discovered (and which studies have since backed up) that the primary motivator for people to change their behavior comes from the actions and behavior of their immediate peer group. Not their families, not their reflection in the mirror, but the people they spend the most time with every day.

We realized that in addition to incentivizing people to visit the clinic doctor and get wellness coaching from our staff, we had to change the environment in which they worked. Their co-workers needed to care about living healthier, too.

So we developed a program and a product that we call the Whole

Health Council – a collection of the organization's employees representing every level of every department. The councils promote their clinic and drive utilization through health initiatives and education. The more awareness the council raises and the more educated people get, the more motivated they are and the healthier they become.

Culture change and Whole Health Councils are distant horizons though when an employer is wrestling with the decision to front the cash for an onsite clinic and pay a monthly fee on top of their existing insurance premiums. But as long we keep reinforcing the outcomes and talking in terms of investment rather than cost, we've found that people have been more than willing to listen.

Both Group Health Cooperative and Seattle Children's are prime examples. Group Health recently signed an agreement to incorporate Vera into their health plan, making Vera their worksite vendor of choice. And Seattle Children's, who had already developed a 10-year plan to improve the health and wellness of their employees, became Vera's first client at the Whole Health Center at the Springbrook Professional

Center. The clinic is scheduled to open this Spring.

The landscape is certainly changing fast. And as long as Vera is able to stay out of the Preservative crosshairs we're excited about our chances.

Peter Li is the VP of Marketing and Communications at Vera Whole Health. He spent the last 12 years raising money for nonprofits like Feeding America, CARE, and Susan G. Komen leveraging budgets in the thousands to create campaigns that raised funds in the millions. He left the nonprofit world to join Vera Whole Health, a market leader in primary care, worksite clinics and behavior change, to see if he could apply the universals of fundraising (selling a product that you can't touch or see) to the healthcare industry. Vera has since signed Seattle Children's and Group Health Cooperative to groundbreaking deals and is expanding rapidly in the Pacific Northwest. Peter can be reached at peter@verawholehealth.com.

Visit Vera Whole Health at www.verawholehealth.com.

Reprinted with permission from the Oregon Healthcare News. To learn more about the Oregon Healthcare News visit orhcnews.com.