Leader Profile

Jeff Sturman

SVP and CIO,
Memorial Healthcare System

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WittKieffer is proud to have supported the recruitment that brought Jeff Sturman to Memorial Healthcare System as SVP and CIO.

Leading IT into the World of Care Providers

Jeff Sturman doesn't fit the profile of a typical healthcare CIO. He was a psychology major in college who then worked as a consultant for Ernst & Young for 10 years. Eventually, Sturman wound his way into healthcare information technology as a way of making a difference in the lives of others. In the following Q&A, he shares insights on how he got to where he is, and how the CIO role has established a critical connection to patient care.

Q: How did you become a leader?

Sturman: My family helped me a great deal, and I was particularly influenced by my mom. She was a homemaker, a teacher by background, and had many leadership positions in large charitable organizations. By seeing what she'd do in various leadership roles, it rubbed off on me.

I am atypical from a traditional CIO. I don't come from a pure-state technical background. I'm not a programmer. I haven't coded. I'm not an engineer. I'm a psychology major who aspired to go into business after deciding not to go to medical school. Fortunately, I surrounded myself with great mentors and leaders. Those relationships I seized upon and used as a springboard for my career path.

Q: What's the most challenging issue that healthcare CIOs are grappling with today, and how are you addressing it?

Sturman: Balancing everything that is on the plate of a CIO today. It includes trying to keep the lights on and maintaining your current environment, and balancing that with projects happening in the world of healthcare and healthcare IT, and then balancing that with finding things that move the needle and deliver care in new ways. It's a combination of operations, and strategy, and innovation, and technology. I can't think of another position that has to balance those things as much as a CIO does.

Q: Is there a silver lining from COVID-19 from an IT perspective? Has it allowed (or forced) you to innovate in ways you might not have otherwise?

Sturman: We are doing things to engage our consumers in such a different way. In years past, we used to always think about patients and consumers coming to us because we are the hospital system in this area and they need to

get services from us. Today, our mentality has shifted to one much more focused on population health, wellness, outpatient care programs, and other initiatives we were setting the foundation for and have now just taken off. That's the silver lining.

Q: In terms of telehealth, are you well ahead of where you thought you'd be prior to COVID?

Sturman: Telehealth is one of those things that, pre-COVID, was a small part of what we did. We've surpassed 160,000 visits this year so far. That's unbelievable. CIOs across the country and world would tell you the same thing: Telehealth is here to stay. Will it stay at the same level and volume as it has during COVID? I don't think so. I think we'll see a shift back to office visits, but our vision is to have more than 50 percent of our patients for primary care seen by telehealth.

Q: Are you energized by the current challenges you're facing? Have they given you a renewed sense of purpose?

Sturman: People who know me will tell you I have no lack of energy. I'm moving a mile a minute and my team is as well. Not only are we energized but we have a renewed sense of purpose. Information technology touches everything more than ever before. We're all part of this care team. The IT team and CIO are an important part of the equation that includes the physician, nurse, therapist and all the other clinical care folks. I always say about my team, "We are care providers. We just do it in a different way."

Q: Are clinicians and care providers more receptive to your help than ever before?

Sturman: They're calling us for creative ways to help them facilitate something, whether it's not burning through PPE, putting a monitor in the nurse's station, or something else. They would tell you that when they think about a care team now—we're actually the ones building bridges to the patient's home. Population health is so crucial to how we take care of patients at home.

Q: Finally, what advice can you offer others about leadership?

Sturman: Surround yourself with great people. Part of my success will ultimately be the people around me being successful, both people who I report to and the people who report to me. It's a team world we live in, especially in healthcare. If we're not working together as a collaborative function and trying to support each other, we're missing the boat.

Also, take risks. We hear so often that failure is not an option. I disagree. Failure is an option—we learn from it. If we don't fail we don't evolve. We're not taking risks.

Finally, listen, listen, listen. Always weigh in and provide direction, but you have to be intentional in listening. Take those things that you hear from your team, your community, your consumers, and make things happen. That's how we mature and evolve to become better.