

Sebastian Gurtner · Katja Soye *Editors*

Challenges and Opportunities in Health Care Management

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ISBN 978-3-319-12177-2

ISBN 978-3-319-12178-9 (eBook)

DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-12178-9

Springer Cham Heidelberg New York Dordrecht London

Library of Congress Control Number: 2014955697

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Printed on acid-free paper

Springer is part of Springer Science+Business Media (www.springer.com)

Preface

The economy we live in is constantly changing. Technology fuels challenging developments like digitalization, the Internet of things, smart objects, or cloud computing. No less significant are changes derived from the mind-set of people interacting with those technologies. Producers, customers, and users face rising complexity in technologies and handle steadily increasing amounts of information.

In this vibrant economic framework, changes tremendously influence man's most valuable asset: health. The healthcare sector is affected by the trends of technology push and shift of needs, but also affects the economic systems of regions and countries in return. The digitalization of society reduces information asymmetries between patients and medical experts. Patient empowerment challenges the patient–physician relationship. However, it is also a chance to integrate patients in decision making or product development. As healthcare technologies become smarter and easier to use, the point of care shifts from hospitals to homes. Stakeholders like governmental or regulatory bodies, providers, suppliers, and patients have to align their strategies and actions to achieve the common goal of efficiency.

We wanted to address these hot topics and draw a vital picture of current challenges in healthcare management. The invited authors of our edited volume present essays from different stakeholder perspectives and describe current research projects, best practices and cases studies from various countries and thereby healthcare systems. The essays analyze the potential of concepts and technologies and derive managerial implications for healthcare providers and technology-driven companies. We thank all authors who have contributed to the present book and wish all interested readers a pleasant journey to “Opportunities and Challenges in Health Care Management”.

Dresden, Germany
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Part I

Health Care System

The Cost Problem in Health Care

Ronny Reinhardt and William J. Oliver

Abstract Healthcare costs are hotly and widely debated, with conflicting perspectives each claiming individually to explain the rising cost of health care. Yet, the global cost problem in healthcare might not be as simple or clearly understood as some hold it out to be. The following chapter presents and elaborates on five theoretical perspectives for understanding the issues underlying rising healthcare costs. Each of these suggests a different path for costs and cost reduction. On one hand, two of the perspectives suggest the inevitability of healthcare cost increases, either because costs are largely for personnel or because patient demographics reflect adverse global population trends. On the other hand, three of the perspectives imply that healthcare costs might be inflated because of regulatory and industry forces unique to health care. Thus, the chapter challenges overly-simplistic explanations of the cost problem, attempting to frame a more rigorous and thoughtful debate among payers, providers and policy makers.

1 Introduction

The rising cost of health care is a demanding challenge for industrialized countries. In all Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries health care expenditures have been growing faster than the GDP (Pammolli et al. 2012). This trend challenges many developed societies and initiates pressure to change for a multitude of different actors in the health care system. For decades, policy makers have tried to “bend the cost curve”. Surprisingly, the explosion of health care costs affects various industrialized countries with different healthcare systems. The cost problem apparently constitutes of common underlying causes.

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Before discussing the causes, we turn to the question: What is the cost problem? The cost problem splits into a static and a dynamic component: (1) costs are perceived as too high (e.g., caused by inefficiency) and (2) health care costs are rising (i.e., rising beyond increases in GDP). Both viewpoints are valid and define the cost problem. Moreover, healthcare practitioners and policy makers seem at a loss as to both what are the mechanisms that have caused cost to rise faster than GDP, and how to “bend the cost curve” to encourage costs to decline. It is the final challenge that presents the most troubling situation and the one to which the chapter is addressed: what are the factors underlying the cost problem? Better understanding of these will help practitioners and policymakers find ways to affect positive change.

There is no single factor underlying the cost problem in health care. Instead, this chapter will review five diverse explanations from different lines of research in order to synthesize the findings for each perspective. This multi-perspective approach will help practitioners and scholars from different backgrounds to gain a richer understanding of why the debate around solving the cost problem has been so challenging. Section 3 summarizes the findings and presents recommendations for policy makers and practitioners. Section 4 concludes with implications for further research and for practitioners working to address the cost problem in health care.

2 Perspectives About the Nature of the Cost Problem

Multiple theoretical perspectives each claim independently to explain the rising share of health care costs. This chapter presents (1) the cost disease perspective, (2) the technology perspective, (3) the system perspective, (4) the information perspective and (5) the patient characteristics perspective. We explain the underlying logic of each perspective and discuss recent research to examine whether the perspectives are supported by empirical findings.

2.1 *The Cost Disease Perspective: It’s Inevitable, But It’s Not a Problem*

What if rising health care costs are not caused by mechanisms inside the system but by mechanisms in other industries that spill over to the health care sector? The cost disease perspective is probably the least well-known perspective about rising health care costs (Bates and Santerre 2012) but offers an interesting explanation of external effects.

According to the cost disease perspective, costs of personal services such as health care, education or theater rise beyond the rate of inflation and will continue to do so (Baumol 2012). In contrast to other industries such as the electronics or the