What Has Happened to Health Care?
By Kalpana (Rose) M. Kumar, M.D.

Over the past few months, I have received more phone calls than ever before from physicians who work within corporate health care. They ‘want out’ of this health care model. They feel it is dehumanizing for both physicians and patients.

What happened to health care?

16 years ago I left corporate health care to create a health care system within which I could practice medicine authentically from a place of integrity. I felt the dissonance (in the corporate model) between the mission it espoused to serve and its behavior towards its patients and physicians. Physicians were caught in the middle of this dissonance and were being feared into treating patients like commodities for revenue.

Two decades ago, this behavior was subtle and did not pervade all health care systems. In the past decade, this has become the normal business framework within corporate health care. Physicians adapted to this approach at first, but over the past decade, the consequences of this approach have been harder to bear. Many have had enough. More than ever, doctors are leaving corporate health care to practice medicine in the community again, to restore meaning to their work.

When I left corporate health care, I wanted to create a system where the business model served not only my vision of health care, but was restorative of its larger vision which had been cast aside by the corporate health care system. I wanted it to be scientifically and medically grounded, yet open to growth and learning, and above all, patient-centered. What I envisioned were two intersecting circles. One circle represented my vision and mission, and the other the business model. I wanted these two aspects to relate to one another symbiotically, with synergy and resonance. The health care practitioner in this model would serve its vision while remaining cognizant of the need to be a healthy, sustainable, and cost effective business. It needed to be environmentally friendly and committed to creating minimal waste. [Health care is one of the largest generators of environmental waste in our country]. It would be committed to promoting health in the community. The standard of practice would be of the highest caliber and its patients and clients would be served with expertise balanced with love and compassion. In this manner, the model I envisioned could bring meaning to both the practitioner and patient, and restore the soul of health care. This model’s success would be reflected in a change in the health of the community served. One of the markers of this would be a rise in the health food market within the surrounding communities demanded by conscious consumers who desire organic food and options for a healthy lifestyle.

What I realized nearly two decades ago was that the mission of corporate health care and its business model were worlds apart. The separation between the two has only grown wider in recent years. Physicians are courted to join the corporate system, but soon discover that what they are serving is a model run by a ‘profit at any cost’ mission. Administrators fear physicians into herding patients through their day to increase profit margin while compromising quality of care. The mission of health care administrators (profit) is far removed from the mission of medicine (healing). This results in a continued loss of meaning for both physicians and patients. The current corporate model is not symbiotic, collaborative, or sustainable. In fact, it is opportunistic. When cells in the body stop collaborating and become opportunistic, we call this ‘cancer’. Corporate health care today resembles the cancer cell in its behavior towards both physicians and patients. It has lost its way.
Years ago when I left corporate health care, I was shamed by administrators who told me I was not a ‘team player’. I did not ‘tow the party line’. Even my colleagues questioned my lack of loyalty to the system to which they had adapted. I refused to adapt to the corporate practices that came between me and the mission of medicine. My conscience would not allow it. After creating The Ommani Center, I practiced alone with no collegial support for well over a decade. I directed my energy towards creating a compassionate yet scientifically grounded health care model based on integrity that embodied a synergy between my vision of health care, its business model, and the essence of Medicine. I wanted it to restore the ‘soul’ of Medicine while honoring the scientific method. This was the only way it could keep patients safe.

Now, 14 years later, my vision and hard work is bearing fruit. Our community has more health food stores, earth based, and organic food than ever before. Fitness centers are plentiful. Even the standard grocery stores have organic choices. The consumer has awoken to the power of ‘food as medicine’ and has experienced a restoration of health and well-being with lifestyle changes. More people are seeking to be educated in how to keep themselves healthy and empowered.

I am greatly encouraged by the movement underfoot. The consumer of health care and the physicians who are squeezed to perform for profit in corporate health care are waking up to the reality of its shadow. It is only by making its shadow conscious can we transform a system.

As we continue to shine the light on corporate health care’s shadow, it will be forced to transform. My hope and dream is that we emerge on a large scale from this with a healthier and more integrative model of health care, one that honors patients, physicians, and also engages a healthy and sustainable business model.

The Ommani Center has proven that this model is a successful as well as a viable solution to the crisis in corporate health care.

©February, 2015 Kalpana (Rose) M. Kumar M.D., CEO and Medical Director, The Ommani Center for Integrative Medicine, Pewaukee, WI www.ommanicenter.com Author of 2nd Edition - Becoming Real: Reclaiming Your Health in Midlife 2014, Medial Press.