

Aging and the Human Experience: We Can Do Better

Perspectives on Aging with Dignity • June 2017



Bruce Chernof, MD, is President and CEO of The SCAN Foundation, dedicated to creating a society where older adults can access health and supportive services of their choosing to meet their needs. The Perspectives Series provides opinions and observations about transforming the way in which we age. Follow Dr. Bruce on Twitter [@DrBruce_TSF](https://twitter.com/DrBruce_TSF).

Last summer, when I saw the older woman in my vegetable garden late at night, I was alarmed. Not because I feared an intruder or felt she was there to make trouble, but because this was the second time this happened. Jane is a grandmother of four, an avid bird-watcher, and a former volunteer at the local food pantry. But she also suffers from a few chronic illnesses, including dementia. That night in my backyard, I helped her back to her own home next to mine and wondered will this happen again? And what, if anything, can be done to help her?

Trips to the hospital after a fall, a slow progression of arthritis, frequent lost keys and confusion—they're part of the human experience people face when aging. As we grow older, we may need to rely more on those around us. In fact, half of Americans turning age 65 today will at some point find themselves needing a high level of help with basic daily activities like walking, eating, getting out of bed in the morning, and bathing. The number of older Americans with complex care needs is projected to jump from 6 million to nearly 16 million in the next couple decades. America is aging, and with that comes different stresses on our health care system.

The reality is that the current care delivery system is not able to handle the incoming wave of aging Americans. It is expensive, disjointed, and places value on quantity of care over quality of outcomes. As a physician, I know that we can do better. That is why it is crucial that we institute a better system of care that will ensure all can age with dignity. We need systems that value community-based supports, assistance for family caregivers, and a person-centered approach to care delivery that places the individual's own wishes at the forefront of any care planning conversation.

The challenge is daunting, and yet I am hopeful. There are evidence-based ways that we can enhance our care systems and help older adults continue to contribute to society in unique and invaluable ways. Working with state health care groups, The SCAN Foundation has supported person-centered care models which embed care coordinators in primary care practices. These care coordinators manage clinical and non-clinical services for vulnerable people like my neighbor Jane, who may need home health services, transportation, and behavioral health care.


There are an increasing number of promising approaches that combine medical and social services to improve care for people with complex needs, with the goal of improving quality of life and reducing overall costs. While much is known, there are still gaps in our collective knowledge and more evaluation of replicable models is needed.

We recently teamed up with The Commonwealth Fund, The John A. Hartford Foundation, the Peterson Center on Healthcare, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to develop a ‘playbook’ of resources with the Institute for Healthcare Improvement. [The Playbook: Better Care for People with Complex Needs](#) is a valuable tool for health system leaders, insurers, and policymakers which curates information on promising practices for improving care for people with complex health and social needs, and presents case studies, analyses, information on relevant policies, and opportunities to reform payment models. The Playbook is important because it allows health care systems to customize an approach that makes sense for their organization and community. There is no “one size fits all” program that health care systems can simply bolt on; the Playbook provides resources and information for building a sustainable program that delivers improved outcomes in a value-driven world.

From structuring a workforce that is more supportive of caregivers, to relying on technology that is more accessible to doctors and those being treated, transformation to improve the quality of life for older adults and their families and caregivers is critical. By scaling known solutions that can make a difference in how people are cared for nationwide, we can dramatically improve the human experience of aging.



The SCAN Foundation
 3800 Kilroy Airport Way, Suite 400
 Long Beach, CA 90806

 Like us on Facebook

(888) 569-7226

www.TheSCANFoundation.org

info@TheSCANFoundation.org

 Follow us on Twitter