

# viewpoint

## A promising model for affordable care

**point of view**  
brian klepper

Health City Cayman Islands (HCCI) is a 3-year-old, 104-bed Caribbean hospital outpost of the Bangalore, India-based Narayana

Health System. Just an hour's flight from Miami, Americans find its island location comfortably familiar, English-speaking and modern.

Specializing in complicated or severe conditions, HCCI has developed care and business models that are so focused on quality and efficiency that it could radically change the standards by which U.S. hospitals are judged.

Most importantly for patients and employers, it provides very high quality. It has been awarded the coveted Joint Commission International (JCI) quality credential at one-half to one-sixth of U.S. pricing.

HCCI's performance is the culmination of a deep commitment to access, efficiency and excellence. Founder and physician Devi Shetty — who earlier in his career was Mother Teresa's personal physician — began with a mission-driven awareness that health care is an essential need and must be affordable to be accessible.

He spearheaded a focus to deliver the best care possible at the lowest possible price.

The results have been remarkable. Fifteen years ago, Narayana Health System's bundled costs for open heart surgery in India averaged about \$2,000. Now they are about \$1,400, or about 1 percent of average U.S. costs.

The costs at the Caribbean hospital are higher but still low compared to U.S. standards.

A coronary artery bypass graft that typically costs about \$151,000 here is \$32,000.

Heart valve replacements, about \$174,000 here, are \$31,000.

Hepatitis C treatments that run about \$75,000 here are \$19,000.

Knee replacements that cost \$60,000 here are \$16,000.

HCCI's capacity to consistently deliver low costs and high quality outcomes is rooted in a relentless willingness to re-think and execute better, more pragmatic approaches.

Hospital common spaces — atriums and open areas — are smaller than we've come to expect in U.S. hospitals, significantly reducing overhead. Each patient room has its own heating and air conditioning unit and ducting, isolating the room's air flow, which dramatically reduces infection.

Operating rooms are connected to the laboratory by pneumatic tubes, so surgeons can get immediate information about patient specimens.

Equipment, supplies and drugs are

*A hospital in the Caribbean is providing valuable lessons on how to provide quality medical care at affordable cost.*

purchased in Europe or India at a fraction of U.S. prices.

Rather than receive a bewildering array of bills, HCCI uses bundled, all-inclusive pricing so simplified that its billing department needs only three people.

Every aspect of hospital function and care process is open to re-examination, which facilitates lots of minor and sometimes major improvements.

Just after HCCI's gala opening in April 2014, Robert Pearl, the physician and CEO of the 19,000 physician Permanente Medical Group, wrote in Forbes, "Based on everything I saw in the Cayman Islands, the operational approaches in Dr. Shetty's hospital are about 10 years ahead of those used in the typical U.S. hospital."

HCCI's health outcomes and prices represent an opportunity for self-insured employers and unions, as well as for self-pay patients, to receive genuinely superior care at far more affordable rates. While getting employers to consider sending patients outside U.S. borders for care has been a challenge, the trickle of those who have become convinced that the quality is strong enough to merit their consideration is growing rapidly.

Imagine how local and state governments, financially strapped by excessive health care costs, could benefit from a higher value resource like this.

Florida's Medicaid program, for example, has some 20,000 patients with Hepatitis C.

Even with a discounted U.S. rate of, say, \$54,000 each, HCCI's bundled rate of \$19,000 — a difference of \$35,000 per patient — could save the state about \$700 million, funds that surely could be used more productively.

It is important to acknowledge that there are U.S. hospitals that have achieved superb quality or very notable cost streamlining.

But it's rare to see such a single-minded focus on affordable cost and excellent quality consistently delivered.

That is HCCI's innovation.

Against a backdrop of systemic health care excess, American employers will increasingly opt for equal or better care at lower cost from facilities like HCCI.

That could force domestic hospitals to follow suit and help to bring American health care back into balance.

Brian Klepper of Atlantic Beach is a health care analyst and a principal of Worksite Health Advisors.

## Trump needs to save Congress from itself



**patrick buchanan**  
creators syndicate

Did the Freedom Caucus pull the Republican Party back off the ledge, before it jumped to its death?

Before the American Health Care Act was pulled off the House floor, it enjoyed the support of 17 percent of

Americans. Had it passed, it faced defeat in the Senate.

Had it survived to be signed by President Donald Trump, it would have meant 14 million Americans losing their health insurance in 2018.

First among the losers would have been white working-class folks who delivered the Rust Belt states to Trump.

This defeat suggests that given the ideological divide in the GOP and the unanimous opposition of congressional Democrats, the most impressive GOP majorities since the 1920s may be impotent to enact any major complicated or complex legislation.

This is another milestone in the decline and fall of Congress.

Through the last century, Congress has steadily surrendered its powers, with feeble resistance, to presidents, the Supreme Court, the Federal Reserve, the regulatory agencies, even the bureaucracy.

Another truth was reconfirmed:

Once an entitlement program has been

created with millions of beneficiaries, it becomes almost impossible to repeal. As Ronald Reagan said, "A government bureau is the nearest thing to eternal life we'll ever see on this Earth."

Nor did Trump escape unscathed.

To have failed on his first big presidential project has been an occasion of merriment for the boo-birds in the Beltway.

And now the nation must live with Obamacare.

A Democratic program from birth, it is visibly failing. And Democrats now own it again, as not one Democrat was there to help reform it.

While the Republicans have sustained a defeat, this is not the end of the world.

If Republican majorities in the House and Senate cannot or will not unite with his White House behind solutions on health care, taxes, infrastructure and border security, Trump will seek out moderate Democrats to get the work done.

What he is saying is simple and direct:

"I am a Republican president who wants to work with Republicans. But if they cannot or will not work with me, I will find another partner with whom to form coalitions to write the laws and enact the reforms America needs — because in the last analysis, while party unity is desirable, the agenda I was elected to enact is critical."

The health care defeat yet may prove to be another example of winning by losing.

### Another view: Tom Stiglich Creators Syndicate



"Peace is hidden from your eyes" (Luke 19:42).

# reason midweek

## We should do more chirping, not less



**ron littlepage**  
times-union columnist

Jacksonville's governmental leaders are quickly charting a perilous course to spend two post-Panamax, super-size container ships full of cash.

And the two ship captains wanting to spend the boat loads

of taxpayer money don't take kindly to anyone questioning the wisdom of that.

One, Mayor Lenny Curry, had this response when asked by a Florida Politics reporter about criticism of his public employee pension plan: "Let the critics chirp."

The other, interim JaxPort CEO Eric Green, described to the Times-Union those who have recently questioned JaxPort's plan to deepen the St. Johns River shipping channel this way: "I think what you have is a lot of the same naysayers saying the same thing."

Well, excuse me.

The Times-Union reported last Sunday that Curry's pension plan, which relies on a half-cent sales tax that can't be collected until 2031, will cost taxpayers \$4.5 billion more than the status quo.

The Times-Union also reported on Sunday that JaxPort is looking to ask the city for between \$93 million and \$167 million to pay the local share of the \$700 million deep dredge.

That kind of money deserves a lot of chirping and naysaying.

There are many questions about Curry's pension plan, which will put all future public employees, including police and firefighters, into 401(k)-style retirement plans. That has been Curry's overriding goal all along.

Did he rely on assumptions that were too optimistic to justify his plan?

Did he promise unions too much to get them to go along?

For instance, Curry uses a 4.25 percent annual growth in the sales tax revenue over the next four decades. A recession similar to the Great Recession would knock that for a loop.

Also much of the money that would be freed by counting the future sales tax dollars as a present day value, as Curry proposes, would be eaten up by the lucrative raises the employees will be getting.

And while selling the new sales tax to voters last summer, Curry's team

predicted the current defined benefit pension plans would be fully funded by 2048 and the sales tax would end.

An actuary for the Police and Fire Pension Fund, however, said this week it's likely the tax would last until 2060, the maximum time allowed by state law.

That prompted the usual diversionary rant from Curry in which he attacked John Keane and the fund's board just as he went out of his way to take a shot at former Mayor Alvin Brown when he pitched his plan to the City Council last week.

Note to Curry:

Brown and Keane are long gone, a new fund executive is in place and all but one of the fund's board members are new.

And you have been mayor for 21 months — nearly two years.

So this is all on you now.

The questions surrounding JaxPort's plan to dredge the channel from 40 feet to 47 feet are also numerous.

One place to start is a closer look at the jobs JaxPort promises will come with deeper water and the bigger ships that need it.

A lot of those jobs if they come will be in warehousing and trucking, not exactly high paying jobs, and robots and technology are reducing the number of workers needed in warehouses.

Why would the super-sized container ships that can now go through a bigger Panama Canal choose Jacksonville when competitor ports in Miami, Savannah and Norfolk are closer to population centers?

While JaxPort was toying with the idea of building a cruise terminal at Mayport, the idea was abandoned when none of the cruise lines would agree to a long-term contract.

The cost of that was peanuts compared to the dredge. Are there any contracts in place to bring the big ships to JaxPort over the long term?

No.

And then there's the fact the cost of Savannah's dredge earlier this month jumped by 38 percent to \$973 million — \$267 million more than originally projected.

When the canary in the coal mine quits chirping, that means trouble. With these huge expenditures, we need more chirping, not less.

ron.littlepage@jacksonville.com (904) 359-4284

## The myths and facts behind car radios

**A "History of the Car Radio" commentary states that two young men named William Lear and Elmer Wavering developed the first car radio after one of their girlfriends suggested that a romantic evening at a lookout point in Illinois would have been made better by music.**

**The facts:** There are conflicting reports about the history of the car radio and who first developed it.

William Lear (who later developed the Lear Jet) and Elmer Wavering (who invented the alternator and served as president of Motorola) were friends and inventors in Quincy, Mo.

Lear and Wavering are often credited with inventing the car radio, as "History of the Car Radio" claims, but the idea that they got the idea from a girlfriend at "Lookout Point" and a few other details are more urban legend than



**FACT CHECK**

Want something checked out?

If you see or hear something that needs a Fact Check, email: [carole.fader@jacksonville.com](mailto:carole.fader@jacksonville.com)

proven fact, TruthOrFiction.com found.

Lear's Encyclopedia Britannica entry, for example, seems to downplay his role in inventing the first car radio.

Lear is credited with coming up with the concept of the car radio, but the entry states that he sold the idea to the Motorola Co. in 1924 when he couldn't finance the idea.

Wavering's 1998 obituary in the New York Times credits him with inventing "what eventually became the first commercial car radio."

When Wavering was in high school, he worked in a radio parts store run by Lear.

The duo put their

heads together and built a car radio that could withstand the rigors of bumpy roads and severe climate changes.

The radio, mounted under the dashboard, cost about \$80 on cars that sold for \$600 to \$800, TruthOrFiction.com reports.

So while it appears that Lear and Wavering came up with the concept of the car radio, it's also fact that they sold it to Paul Galvin, who called the radio a Motorola.

And it was Galvin who eventually brought the car radio to market.

There are other ideas as well about who built the first car radio.

Many radio enthusiasts credit George Frost of Chicago with being the first to build a car radio in 1922, according to Radio Museum.

The verdict:

Some of the facts in the "History of the Car Radio" commentary are true, but others can't be proven or are disputed.

## Parents must do more to stop bullying

**brief letters**

The tragic death of an 11-year-old by suicide was at least partially blamed on the school administration.

How is this their responsibility? Students who think that the fake death of another student is funny are a major part of the problem.

An 11-year-old with a cell phone that the parents do not know about may be another contributing factor.

There seems to be an abundance of information being put out about the dangers of all the social media out there. The bottom line, as they say, still seems to be the ultimate responsibility of the parents.

**John Grassell**, Orange Park

### SUPPORT FOR SYRIA ATTACK

The U.S. attack on Syrian military bases was justified because former President Barack Obama had already warned Syrian President Bashar al-Assad of consequences should he use chemical weapons on his people again.

After Obama left the White House, however, Assad thought it was back to business as usual.

But President Donald Trump recently proved Assad wrong.

It is now up to Assad choose the right path and gradually leave his office for the good of the Syrian people.

**Raghav Bhatnagar**, Jacksonville

### PUTIN AND TRUMP

Now that the world sees that Russian President Vladimir Putin and President Donald Trump are not buddies, will the Democrats stop telling the politically motivated and deceitful lie that Putin helped Trump get elected?

**Michael Pelt**, Jacksonville

### SANCTUARY CITIES AND TAXPAYERS

Reading the letters in the Times-Union about sanctuary cities, some people who support them want to take the "Christian" angle.

They want to say Christians should take in the poor and hungry.

But illegal immigrants are still breaking the law.

If charitable organizations want to fund it and take them in, then so be it.

But don't use my tax money to fund them.

**Joey Stevens**, Jacksonville