Rising to the Challenge
An Interview with AMGA’s Dr. John Kennedy

John W. Kennedy, M.D., is chief medical officer, AMGA, and president, AMGA Foundation. He previously served as division director of endocrinology at Geisinger Health System in Danville, Pennsylvania, where he led the clinical, education, research, and quality program development and expansion for the health system. Dr. Kennedy is board certified in endocrinology, diabetes, and metabolism. Group Practice Journal interviewed Dr. Kennedy about trends in the industry and his vision for AMGA Foundation.

GPJ: In the shift from volume to value, how important is a population health strategy to taking on risk?
Kennedy: A well-defined systematic population health strategy is critical to a medical group’s success in navigating the road from volume to value. This helps to both improve the quality of care delivery and to drive efficient care transformation in a manner that best utilizes available resources.

GPJ: What are some of the most important elements of successful population health strategy?
Kennedy: Physician-led care transformation teams, including quality-focused leaders in administration, strategy, insurance, pharmacy, nursing, information technology, electronic health records, primary care, specialty care, and others who are committed to disrupting existing care norms to drive value-based care delivered to patients in the right place and time which improves the patient experience in receiving care.

GPJ: How do you think value-based models are impacting patient care?
Kennedy: Value-based models are the forcing function which prompts healthcare delivery systems to evaluate the total cost of services delivered to a population over time. This is truly transforming the landscape in health care today, as each medical group and integrated care delivery system determines the optimal response to these trends.

GPJ: How did your experience as division director of endocrinology at Geisinger Health System prepare you for your role as chief medical officer at AMGA and president of AMGA Foundation?
Kennedy: By studying the problem of the diabetes epidemic on patients, providers, and populations, Geisinger was able to develop a system of care that was quite robust—closing patient care gaps within their primary care practice on important quality metrics related to diabetes control, hypertension, lipid management with statins, medical attention to nephropathy, and a bundle metric. Geisinger remained nimble and adaptable to a changing landscape that also includes avoiding complications on the eye, feet, and heart for patients with diabetes. Geisinger also recognized that in order to get ahead of the curve for the next generation of patients, it is important to focus efforts on prevention and treatment of diabetes in the community setting. This flexibility was built into the Diabetes Care Transformation strategy, and is now serving as a role model for other chronic disease states at Geisinger. These are all lessons that will inform and enrich my work for AMGA and the Foundation, particularly in developing and sharing best practices for managing patients with chronic conditions.

GPJ: Many AMGA members participate in AMGA quality improvement programs, which have been extremely successful, impacting care for more than 26 million Americans. What ideas do you have to expand and engage even more members?
Kennedy: At AMGA, we are proud of what has been accomplished from our member groups participating in our chronic care quality improvement campaigns and collaboratives, and we are expanding the reach and impact of these initiatives. For example AMGA’s Together 2 Goal® campaign is currently launching two new tracks for up to 20 of our most innovative groups to measurably reduce the burden of cardiovascular disease and eye disease in the vulnerable Type 2 diabetes population. Plans are in the works to extend Together 2 Goal® for an additional two years. We are

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also working collaboratively with our members on defining the framework and measures to address the obesity epidemic. Other groups are working with AMGA to understand the nuances of new payment models proposed and adapted by recent Congressional action. And, we have a large number of groups that are sharing best practices and significantly improving flu and pneumococcal vaccination rates in their patient populations. We will evaluate the impact of all of these campaigns and collaboratives to inform our next projects. Stay tuned!

GPJ: What are your long-term goals for AMGA Foundation? Kennedy: We have developed our Vision 2025 strategy for the Foundation to positively impact 100 million lives by leveraging our AMGA members’ reach and impact on the patients and populations they serve every day. This vision will be driven by resources raised through our AMGA Foundation Campaign for a Healthier America.

GPJ: What are the biggest challenges of your new role? And what are you most looking forward to? Kennedy: I am most looking forward to meeting all of the AMGA members who are actively engaged in chronic care initiatives to improve patient outcomes in their populations. I am anxious to learn how strategies differ in different group practice environments, in different geographies, and among the diverse landscape of patients who rely on AMGA physicians for their health care. I look forward to the challenge of changing the trajectory of chronic disease burden in the United States and advancing solutions that will benefit all of the AMGA member organizations I am honored to serve.

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