Cancer healthcare: change is the only constant

Ben Holland* speaks to Francesca Lake, Managing Commissioning Editor:

Ben Holland is a nationally known expert on oncology-specific consulting solutions in the USA. Over the past decade, he has led consulting projects for some of the most prestigious hospitals and cancer centers in the USA, including California's Cedars-Sinai Health System (CA, USA), Roswell Park Cancer Institute in New York (NY, USA), Carolinas HealthCare System (NC, USA) and Providence Health Care in Washington state (USA). He frequently speaks at some of the most well-attended conferences in the country,

including those presented by the Association of Community Cancer Centers and the Association of Cancer Executives, and has recently published articles in the *Journal of Oncology Practice*. As Kurt Salmon's National Director of Cancer Services, Holland will lead the global management consulting firm's oncology service line.

Q You have recently joined Kurt Salmon as the National Director of Cancer Services. Could you tell our readers a little about Kurt Salmon's oncology services?

We help provider establishments help patients. The primary goal of the Kurt Salmon oncology care consulting team is to help community hospitals, academic medical centers, integrated health systems, freestanding cancer centers and physician groups coordinate and deliver multidisciplinary, team-based cancer care in a patient-centered environment. More specifically, our comprehensive cancer care programming initiatives include service line planning and differentiation, clinical integration and care delivery coordination, oncology network development, and organizational design.

Q What does your role entail & what are your main aims?

The USA has an unbelievable assemblage of healthcare centers in metro areas such as Los Angeles (CA, USA), and towns such as Buffalo (NY, USA), New York (NY, USA) and Spokane (WA, USA). I'm 10 years into my career, and I've been to more than 75 healthcare centers around the country, in such places. I cover the country, traveling from the busiest airport in the world, Atlanta (GA, USA), which also just so happens to be my hometown.

My aim is simple: help my clients care for their patients the best they can. My work focuses largely on strategic planning and development. That typically includes assisting with visioning, market positioning, clinical service line development, financial modeling and implementation of strategic and organizational options. I also regularly advise clients on cancer center feasibility, National Cancer Institute designation, oncology operational assessments, joint ventures and subspecialty program development.

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- cancer healthcare planning
- cancer healthcare provider planning

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Q What led you to this area of work?

The desire to solve problems in a meaningful field. Healthcare is a necessity, and the provider sector is the most direct way to influence real change. I enjoy the variety of different client projects in which I am involved, and the fact that no 2 days are the same.

Early in my career I had the opportunity to work with one of the largest independent cancer care consulting firms in the country. That's where I gained the majority of my knowledge about oncology and cancer care. I picked up the business side of healthcare the same way that most of us do – trial by fire. Don't get me wrong, my business degrees are invaluable, but there is no substitute for working on-site on a day-in, day-out basis.

Q How will this role differ from your previous ones such as at Cedars-Sinai Health System, Roswell Park Cancer Institute, Carolinas HealthCare System & Providence Health Care?

In some ways, my new role really won't be that much different from my previous positions. I will continue to assist clients on strategic initiatives and programmatic needs. The only difference is that my clients will have the additional benefit and support of the entire Kurt Salmon Health Care Group.

For example, I could be on-site assisting a client with a clinical integration project and realize that they also have an issue with old technology or inefficient operating systems. Uncovering those types of challenges typically presents a whole new set of challenges, some of which would have hindered or stalled the successful implementation of the work I was there to do in the first place. Now, if I encounter an issue like that, I've got the support of some of the best minds in consulting.

Q What are you most looking forward to in your new role?

The depth and breadth of the Kurt Salmon team creates a really unique service for our clients. I believe our combination of oncology subject matter expertise and functional expertise in facilities and capital planning, operations, and IT is unrivaled. It allows us to maximize the strength of the individual cancer program while optimizing resource allocation in the context of the overall delivery system. Additionally, my foremost passions are problem

solving and relationship building. I get to do that every day, and I get to do it with first-class clients and colleagues.

Q What do you feel is your biggest achievement working within the oncology field thus far?

So far, helping institutions understand how the clinical and business considerations of comprehensive cancer care really do affect the patient.

It's easy to get wrapped up in the numbers – increasing efficiency by X here or saving Y dollars there – but the reason I do what I do is that I know my efforts, indirect as they may seem at times, help the institution deliver the best possible patient outcome.

Q What do you feel is the biggest challenge facing cancer healthcare & how should we tackle it?

Serving the sheer demand for cancer care services over the next decade may be our biggest challenge. Over the last 35 years there has been a 75% increase in new cancer diagnoses and a 250% increase in those living with the disease (survivors). Those statistics will continue to rise as the 'baby boomer' population ages.

I think the future of cancer care really does rest on our ability to treat the whole patient – not just the disease. Oncology providers must be coordinated within internal (and external) systems to improve quality and reduce costs, otherwise, the system will fail to serve those in great need.

Guiding patients along the entire cancer care continuum is just as important as utilizing the latest and greatest treatment modalities. We can't lose sight of the fact that quality of care includes every touchpoint and every impression, from diagnosis to end-of-life preparation and planning.

Q What do you envisage as the future of cancer care?

The future of cancer care will be increasingly differentiated and data driven. This will lead to more targeted, less invasive, value-oriented therapies. Cancer care will be continuous as we extend the length of life and the quality of life. In addition, the patient and family will be more engaged in every step of the process and will partner with the provider to receive

personalized care. As we continue to learn more about the disease, we must channel this knowledge into applicable treatment improvements for each patient.

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