



# KEY TAKEAWAYS

## from Modern Healthcare's Annual Women Leaders in Healthcare Conference

By Opal H. Greenway

Modern Healthcare (MH) hosted its annual **Women Leaders in Healthcare Conference** last week in Chicago, and I had the opportunity to attend. While MH has done a fantastic job the past two years creating its virtual conference, there is nothing quite like being back in person with hundreds of women who dedicate their lives to advancing healthcare. As the closing keynote speaker, Julie Weber, former Chief People Officer of Southwest Airlines, noted, "In healthcare, you take care of everyone, but who is taking care of you?". A significant answer to that question lay within each room over the two-day conference. The reality is the women at this conference show up to take care of one another. For many, this is what refills our cup—having a network of fellow women leaders to combat the loneliness that often comes with leadership. For the many women healthcare leaders who could not leave their respective organizations and travel to fill their cup in this way, especially those in our Women's Rural Healthcare Executive Network (WRHEN), I wanted to share my key takeaways from this amazing conference. We must pay it forward, and hopefully next year, more can join us and continue to strengthen the network that is women leaders in healthcare.

**01 Fortitude, not resilience.** The conference's opening keynote speaker, Rear Admiral Aisha K. Mix, Chief Nurse Officer, inspired us with stories of the meaningful work done by our uniformed nurse officers serving in the Commissioned Corps of the US Public Health Service. The Admiral explained that we cannot rely on resilience; no rubber band stretched to an extreme returns to its original form. Rather, it is about strengthening ourselves through having courage in the face of pain and adversity. We will never go back to "pre-pandemic," but we have all had opportunities, and will continue to have opportunities, to ground ourselves in the fortitude we have built through the pandemic.



## 02

**The status quo is a bias that resides in all of us, and it is unacceptable for the future of healthcare.** The pandemic has left us in the unique position to let go of the misconceptions that reside in institutional knowledge. We can no longer rely on statements such as “they say...” even if it means questioning others in the room. Who are “they?” Stacia Cohen, EVP of Health Services for CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield, encourages us to ask that question out loud, even if it makes people around us uncomfortable.

It is time to challenge conventional knowledge and be creative. This may lead to new ideas, unique partnerships, or making investments in technology and teaching providers and patients to become superusers of that technology. It may mean leaving our comfort zone and moving farther toward focusing on healthcare rather than sick care than what the reimbursement model currently allows.

Phyllis Doulaveris, SVP of Patient Care Services and Chief Nursing Officer of Banner Health, described the process of moving nurses to four-hour block scheduling with all nurses required to perform a specified number of blocks per week, but not necessarily requiring a 12-hour shift; this innovation provided flexibility for nurses that had to pick up children from school as well as for those that wanted a consolidated week. Challenging the status quo means evaluating the “do-nothing cost” and tackling the question of what happens if you continue with things as they’ve always been.



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***Finding joy in your work does not mean you do not find joy in other aspects of your life, and it’s time to let go of that shame.***

***Deborah Gordon,***

*Chief Administrative Officer and Chief Legal Officer of Memorial Hermann Health System*

## 03

**Listening is fundamental to all aspects of leadership.** Whether you first heard “you have one mouth and two ears” when you were five or fifty, the adage still applies. This may mean choosing to listen to a sponsor who has faith in you instead of the doubting voices in your head, as my co-panelist Michelle Figueroa, COO of NYC Hospitals and Health Systems, pointed out to those looking for sponsorship. It also means listening to yourself deeply enough to understand what truly brings you joy in your career. This may mean acknowledging and owning if your work makes you happy.

Deborah Gordon, Chief Administrative Officer and Chief Legal Officer of Memorial Hermann Health System, reminded us that even mothers can own their careers and urged us to not carry guilt for finding joy in our work. Finding joy in your work does not mean you do not find joy in other aspects of your life, and it’s time to let go of that shame.



## 04

**Gen Z is not the enemy.** The newest generation to enter the healthcare workforce must be acknowledged. According to the World Economic Forum, 38% of Gen Zers are aiming for a healthcare career. We are currently operating in a world that has five generations in the workforce, and those in leadership tend to be in the Traditionalist, Baby Boomer, and Generation X groups. We may be focused on the fact that productivity data says it takes two Millennial/Gen Z physicians to replace one Baby Boomer, but we have to look beyond that to embrace the generational differences and learn how to lead all five generations. That includes recognizing what kind of flexibility each generation wants, whether it means providing financial advisory benefits, pet insurance, or sabbaticals; flexibility is different for everyone.



Dr. Susan Turney, President and Chief Executive Officer of Marshfield Clinic Health System, values being transparent about the stakes and telling people why not when necessary. Millennials and Gen Zers want consistent feedback loops—listen to their ideas, acknowledge how you have considered them, and communicate the result, even if the answer is explaining “why not” as you move in another direction. Know when perfection is required, but when it is not, create the space and the cadence for practice so that your up-and-coming leaders can build their confidence, as emphasized by Commissioner of the Chicago Department of Public Health Dr. Allison Arwady.

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## 05

**Finally, release the outcome.** The women leaders around you are as burned out as our workforce. Holding on to the outcome of every decision once it is out of your hands is like eating well, exercising, and doing everything possible to keep ourselves healthy, but still holding on to the potential of a heart attack. This anxiety does not serve us. You did your best. Now, let it go.



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