



Robert C. Garrett is the CEO of Hackensack Meridian Health, New Jersey's largest and most integrated health network.

Patients are the winners in this merger

By Robert C. Garrett and Warren Geller



Hackensack Meridian Health



ENGLEWOOD HEALTH



Warren Geller is the President and CEO of Englewood Health.

A major trend in health care today is the merging of health networks, a strategy that the American Hospital Association concluded often improves patient outcomes and lowers costs.

We believe the merger of our health networks will give patients more high-quality care options, improve the patient experience and strengthen our ability to continue to invest in the communities we are privileged to serve.

In short, when we join forces, we build a stronger, more responsive health system today and prepare for a new future where patients will access care very differently.

In this new state of health care, the smart phone will replace the hospital as the center of the health care universe and medicine will focus as much on preventing disease as curing it. Here's how this merger will benefit communities in North Jersey – pending regulatory approval - and ensure we will be there for generations to come.

First, the investment of \$400 million over several years in Englewood Health will increase access to care, convenience and innovative treatment in North Jersey in several important ways: we will build new ambulatory care centers – with physician offices, diagnostic services and urgent care – so patients can receive care closer to home and on their schedule.

We will expand cardiac catheterization facilities; build new operating rooms to accommodate highly sophisticated surgical and diagnostic equipment; open a new endoscopy center as well as a new neonatal intensive care unit.

This is not simply about acquiring new equipment or providing patients with the latest procedure; it's about reimagining what a health care experience can be and making that vision a reality for patients – every day.

Second, there's an old proverb we believe in: If you want to go fast, go alone, but if you want to go far, go together. It is imperative that we join forces to properly prepare for major shifts in care delivery. Advances in technology like telemedicine

and remote monitoring will create easier access to care and help providers focus more on prevention and wellness. It's about time.

The U.S. invests more in treatment than most other industrialized nations, and we don't always have the best outcomes to show for it. For the third year in a row, life expectancy in the U.S. is declining, largely due to the opioid epidemic and a significant increase in suicide.

In a sense, we are trying to change our course and accelerate progress. We must invest in costly systems and tools to do this, expenses that are daunting or outright prohibitive for stand-alone hospitals or small networks.

This includes electronic medical records; sophisticated analytic tools; and new frontiers like Artificial Intelligence to help us detect optimal treatment patterns so we know – with great precision – what's working best to keep our patients healthy and out of hospitals.

Think about just one chronic and costly disease – diabetes. More than 30 million Americans live with this chronic illness and their health care costs are 2.3 times greater than those without diabetes. One in seven health care dollars goes to treat diabetes and its complications. Now, consider the tsunami of new patients coming our way – 84 million Americans have prediabetes.

We must intervene much earlier, to spare people the misery of illness and our health system an exorbitant cost. This is the future of medicine. That's why part of the \$400 million investment in Englewood Health includes launching the "Live Well Project: A Pre-Diabetes Initiative" which addresses chronic disease and care management that focuses on prevention and early diagnosis of diabetes.

Third, there's no way we can deliver high quality care for our patients without writing a new narrative for behavioral health care. This merger will expand access for North Jersey patients and provides more coordinated and innovative care.

This is so important because 1 in 5 adults live with mental illness. And last year, New Jersey lost more than 3,100 people to overdoses. As part of Hackensack Meridian Health, Englewood patients will have access to experts at Carrier Clinic, a leading behavioral health provider.

Additionally, Hackensack Meridian's plan to open The Retreat at Ramapo Valley in Mahwah this winter, a 90-bed addiction treatment center on 40 acres with extensive outpatient and highly coordinated care.

Last month, Hackensack Meridian opened New Jersey's first urgent behavioral health center, a model that will be replicated throughout our network so behavioral health patients have options besides the emergency department.

Fourth, Englewood Health has a proud history of service in North Jersey and this exceptional team will continue to serve patients with the same level of excellence that has been a hallmark of the organization for 130 years.

After the merger, Englewood Health will continue to operate its hospital and foundation board of trustees. The merger allows Englewood to preserve its cherished local identity while accessing the tremendous resources that are inherent in a 17-hospital system with a vast network of patient care locations. Englewood will also continue its notable philanthropy programs, which has recently included a successful \$50 million campaign.

Together, we believe we will continue to deliver the most innovative and compassionate care for our communities, now and for decades to come. Together, we are stronger. Together we will thrive. And most important, the patients we serve will be the real winners.

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