

# Executive Insight

Strategies and Solutions for Healthcare



## Benchmarking Women's Leadership

Meet four women who are reshaping healthcare management. *By Michael Gibbons*

Don't look now, but the two loftiest management positions in the U.S. healthcare industry are both held by women.

One of them is **Kathleen Sebelius**, secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services. The other is **Marilyn Tavenner**, the former ICU nurse just selected to steer the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) into the future.

With more women pursuing educations in healthcare, it's inevitable that females will become fixtures in the C-suites and boardrooms of the Mayo Clinics, Kaiser Permanentes, and Johnson & Johnsons of this world.

We'd like to introduce you to four who already have.

All four of them could have aimed lower on the corporate totem pole than their talents warranted. Instead, each refused to let hierarchies top-heavy with males deter their ambitions. "My parents always taught me that success is governed by one's com-



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petency, not one's gender," said one, **Diane Hirakawa**. Here's a closer peek at four women who are reshaping healthcare.

#### Lung Cancer Crusader

As CEO of Riverain Medical, of Miamisburg, OH, Diane Hirakawa has it in for lung cancer.

Hirakawa has strategically placed her company's twin technologies into many leading cancer centers. One is SoftView®, software that increases the clarity of chest



X-rays by suppressing bone on the digital image. The other is OnGuard™, computer-aided detection technology that identifies suspicious areas on a chest X-ray.

"We have an opportunity to change the fatal path of lung cancer to one that is curable," said Hirakawa, who has a sister battling the disease.

A nutritionist by training, Hirakawa had mostly male bosses throughout her academic and professional careers. Happily, they were enlightened sorts not steeped in

old-school gender bias. "Matter of fact, one asked 'Why do women want equal rights when they are clearly superior performers?'" she recalled. "He said women think with both sides of their brains and can multitask better than men."

Those bosses treated her as an equal, holding her to high standards. "Even if my children were sick, I had to perform," Hirakawa said. "Even if I was up all night making a Halloween costume or decorating Christmas cookies and wrapping Santa gifts, I had to perform. I never whined about the responsibilities of a working mom. I joked, but never whined!"

Asked if females manage differently than men, Hirakawa wouldn't take the bait. "I believe there are characteristics of great leaders regardless of gender," she said. "It's all about personal drive and inspiration."

#### Passion to Make a Difference

Everyone knows global consumer goods giant Kimberly-Clark, maker of Huggies, Kleenex and Scott tissues. Kimberly-Clark has also emerged as a major player in the medical device market, with annual revenues exceeding \$1 billion.

CEO **Joanne Bauer** has guided the growth of Kimberly-Clark Health Care since 2001. She has repositioned the company from a provider of personal protective equipment to higher-order medical devices that help reduce healthcare-associated infections.

"I was fortunate to be part of the original team that launched the **DEPEND®** Adult Incontinence Products nation-



wide," Bauer reflected. "While I didn't know it at the time, my experience with that product line foreshadowed a passion for working with products that make a positive difference in people's lives."

Bauer had always worked in industries helmed predominantly by men but remained unaffected by it, thanks in part to strong family support. "I grew up with two sisters and two brothers, and our parents taught us we could do whatever we wanted," she said. "So, my outlook has never focused on male versus female. I see two important focus areas – doing the best job you can and respecting the team on which you are working."

Proudly pointing out that she's not the only female executive at Kimberly-Clark, Bauer had this advice for women on the way up: "They should believe in themselves, speak up and take credit for their good work and, finally, think ahead of time about what they want out of the work-life balance."

### Enabler and Coach

As a practicing endocrinologist, **Suzanne Sysko Clough**, MD, worried that some diabetic patients left the office ill-equipped to manage their conditions.



lots of questions. It becomes impossible, in 15 or 20 minutes, to meet both sets of needs. I thought we could do

"It is easy to label patients as noncompliant but I stepped back and observed what went on during a typical patient visit," she explained. "Doctors and patients have competing agendas. Physicians check if the patient's labs and vaccines are up to date. Patients are very busy and have

better."

She resigned from clinical practice and co-founded Well-Doc, Inc., a company that uses mobile devices to optimize communication among all stakeholders within a patient's medical ecosystem.

"We have two variations of the product," Sysko Clough explained. "One is a service enabler for disease management organizations. We augment their service with real-time data to help them determine which patients need help now. Our other variation is a patient-coaching component, through a partnership with AT&T."

Whether "by luck, ignorance, or timing," Sysko Clough says she has never known gender bias in her professional life, adding: "I take the train to work with five female co-workers. Three of our husbands are stay-at-home dads. This was just not the case 10 years ago. As we continue to break down the rigid rules and expectations of which gender can and should work at home versus in the work place, the playing fields become more level."

### Muffin-Making to Management

After taking a break from nursing, then taking a break from the corporate world, Pat Button found herself running a B&B in Vermont when she got a call from an old friend, Scott Winegarten, founder of Zynx Health, the Los Angeles-based provider of clinical decision software.

"Scott said, 'I know you're busy making muffins, but I'd like to talk to you about something,'" Button recalled. "He was thinking about expanding Zynx to include evidence-based care that clinicians besides doctors provide. Would I be interested in doing a market analysis?"

She was. "It was quickly apparent nurses and others needed this service and had a willingness to buy," she explained. "I didn't have time to make muffins anymore



and sold the B&B."

Today, Button serves as Zynx's chief nursing officer. About half of all patients hospitalized in the U.S. receive care informed by clinical decision-support technology Button helped pioneer for Zynx.

While gender bias lingers in health care management, society has evolved dramatically, Button believes. "Highly educated, competent women are moving into significant positions — and not just as chief nursing officers but as COOs and CIOs," she said.

Button also thinks female leaders are inclined to be more aware of and considerate of others. "This is not based on research," she said, "but female executives tend to appreciate the power and value of teamwork and to foster that concept of team."