

Nashville Business Journal

2008 Healthcare Heroes

Nominee: Christopher Parks, CEO & co-Founder, change:healthcare

Category: Innovator -- A professional who is breaking new ground in the medical arena through a new advancement or an improvement of efficiencies or a current initiative.

A family tragedy in 2006 and a compassionate desire to help ease people's steps through the healthcare maze led Christopher Parks to become a healthcare innovator. And thousands today are better off because of it.

Christopher Parks has spent his entire career in the healthcare industry. He began as a Program Manager for disease management firm Healthways, where he led the start-up and management of two inpatient/outpatient hospital-based chronic disease clinics. Following that, he was a senior consultant at HealthCare Microsystems and Regional Director of Operations for National Seating & Mobility, where he oversaw the Kaiser southern California seating & positioning capitulated agreement. His most recent position was with Global Healthcare Exchange (previously Neoforma), a billion dollar healthcare technology and services organization, where he held a series of national services and sales positions.

But two years ago, personal events dramatically changed his life.

In 2006, Christopher lost both parents – Mike and Jean Parks – a year apart to cancer. In working through the piles of medical bills, invoices and explanation of benefits (EOBs) that accompanied their care, Parks found himself unable to make heads or tails of all the paperwork. “Which doctor has been paid? Who still needs to be paid? How much? I’ve never heard of this doctor so why is he sending a bill? Has insurance properly reimbursed us? Have I paid too much?”

Despite having worked seventeen years in healthcare, Parks learned that sorting through mountains of medical bills and related documents was more than frustrating. It was almost impossible. And not nearly as much fun as a colonoscopy.

Parks was exasperated. The healthcare system shouldn't be this confusing, nor its paperwork so overwhelming, he reasoned... especially at such a difficult time for people. Even more, he felt consumers needed access to much more information in order to make reasonably intelligent healthcare decisions for themselves and their families. So the entrepreneur united a variety of programmers and created a product he called MedBillManager, a web-based tool aimed at helping consumers organize, track and manage their medical bills. It also helped them compare costs and quality with their peers in secure confidence.

Stephen Girdley, an Atlanta medical equipment salesman, began using the tool after taking his then two-year-old son to roughly four doctor appointments a week. Inundated with bills and EOBs, the confusing mound of paper made it difficult for him to answer questions from his insurance company. “If you get a lot of medical bills, wow, that can be really confusing,” he said. But the online system helped him get organized and provided him a single summary of all bills, which made talking to his insurance company easier.

The product put consumers back in the healthcare driver seat just as the new dynamic of consumer-driven healthcare was gaining traction. The tool has since been profiled in *Oprah* magazine and the *Wall Street Journal*.

Joining with fellow entrepreneur Robert Hendrick, who had launched a series of successful technology and healthcare ventures and had his own story to tell concerning challenges with the industry, Parks created a new company – change:healthcare – and transformed MedBillManager

into the “change:healthcare bill management tool.” The company’s mission: To promote transparency in the healthcare industry by following the dollar for the consumer.

Radical concept, huh?

Today, change:healthcare (www.changehealthcare.com) provides cost and quality information about providers, prescriptions, health issues and insurances to consumers, helping them better understand and navigate the healthcare system. It also brings employees and employers together – especially those at self-insured companies – arming them with the tools necessary to take control of their healthcare benefits and make smarter decisions that save everyone time and money.

For instance, the company recently re-launched a rating tool it calls “Medstimate,” which profiles what healthcare providers nationwide accept as negotiated prices for their services. So, thanks to Parks, fair pricing for consumer-driven healthcare has now been exposed!

“As a vice president of HR at a healthcare management firm, I would stand before our employees and conduct meetings about the company’s healthcare program,” says Chiara Bell, CEO and Founder of ENURGI, a web-based healthcare service company that connects families and patients in need with local healthcare resources. “I preached to them about data and using information before they made a healthcare purchase (to keep costs down), yet at the time of their purchase, doctor visit or surgery, the employee had nowhere to compare pricing, physicians or quality of services. Enter change:healthcare, all with the focused effort to fill the information void for healthcare consumers.”

Chris Hartnett, a registered representative at employee benefit firm Roussel and Associates, agrees that change:healthcare is a valuable tool, and recently signed up for the company’s corporate support package to help with the claims management work he does for clients. “I don’t believe we need to just throw up our hands and do nothing about the price of healthcare,” he says. “I like what this company is doing – they are independent. They have no stake in the game, they aren’t a hospital or insurance company.”

Interestingly, Parks’ innovation still has few competitors. On the cutting edge of a new product category, only a small handful of companies offer similar services and change:healthcare appears to be the only one that combines quality insights with the true cost of healthcare.

So, the result of Christopher Park’s personal pain? Empowered consumers and engaged employees now have innovative tools to help them make sound healthcare decisions and begin lowering their healthcare costs. At this time, more than 15,000 users are sharing vital information concerning more than 2.5 million providers and 10,000 medical services through the change:healthcare platform.

Who says heartbreak can’t morph into something truly helpful for people? Healthcare innovator Christopher Parks certainly thinks it can.

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