

Insights from a Health Care Executive on the Ground

By Reese Edwards, Vice-President Brazil International Affairs, UnitedHealth Group

Brazil's health care landscape is changing rapidly. A child born here in 1990 had an average life expectancy of 66 years, but a baby born in 2015 can expect to live to 74. Just last year Brazil was removed from the UN World Hunger Map for the first time. The food challenge now? Obesity. The 40 million citizens who gained access to the middle and working classes over the last decade have raised their expectations for themselves and their children. And these changes are presenting new challenges for the world's largest public health care system.

But it's not just the public system facing pressures, Brazil's private health market which is the second largest after the U.S. also is facing new issues. To tackle these challenges, many policymakers are beginning not to see a bifurcated system – "public" and "private" – but an integrated ecosystem with multiple entry points and options to serve its citizens' needs. The key now is to develop policies that will allow for the delivery of the right service at the right entry point as efficiently and effectively as possible. A doctor should be able to obtain the medical history of the patient electronically. The patient should have access to tools to help them manage their care. A payer, whether government or business, should have access to information around Global Population Health to better allocate resources and address emerging challenges in the early stages rather than after they become a health or financial crisis.

And, like many nations, Brazil's systems are still too fragmented. So how do we break down these barriers to create a simpler, more integrated system? With three important developments: the advent of advanced data analytics, the creation of interoperable systems and the adoption of advanced clinical protocols focused on the patient. By focusing on these three elements, integration is arriving in Brazil. Moving forward, those organizations positioned to do well are those that can integrate data analytics, interoperability, and advanced clinical protocols to help decision makers identify patients with critical health care needs, uncover gaps in care, reduce expenses and avoid costly hospitalizations for targeted populations. Companies and governments who understand this can successfully develop the right responses to meet Brazil's health care needs. And success means Brazilians will see an expansion of choices and opportunities that meet their expectations. This expansion is critical because Brazilians consistently place good health care as one of the most important issues facing society.

For more info: http://export.gov/brazil/industryhighlights/healthit/eg_br_084597.asp