

Innovation Opportunities

An Interview with
**Thomas Thornton, Senior Vice President,
 North Shore Ventures, North Shore-LIJ Health System**



Thomas Thornton

EDITORS' NOTE *In this role, Thomas Thornton manages all of North Shore-LIJ's innovation programs, including technology commercialization, enterprise growth, and investment management. Prior to joining North Shore-LIJ, he led the Healthcare Innovation Alliance at Cleveland Clinic Innovations, a program aimed at forming multi-institutional collaborations to foster and accelerate the commercialization of medical innovations.*

How critical is the focus on innovation for North Shore-LIJ and what is your role in that area?

It's essential. North Shore-LIJ is a culture of tinkerers, which has been extraordinarily important to its success, certainly given the complexities of healthcare going forward.

Innovation is defined broadly here, so it could be represented by a practice improvement, a process improvement, a new medical device, or an entirely new business.

Every Monday, Mike Dowling (President and CEO) participates in the health system's orientation session called Beginnings, in which every new employee must take part. He talks about North Shore-LIJ's culture, emphasizing the importance of innovation, and why it's important and where it's going to take us.

He also describes it as a personal activity where, when everyone is open to new ideas, there is a magic to it over a period of time. Innovation has been encouraged to the extent that it is now part of North Shore-LIJ's culture. Innovation is recognized and rewarded; and it's going to be a significant part of our growth going forward.

Are the opportunities that innovation provides a natural extension from the traditional model?

We have existing, world-class capabilities that are very mature, so new ones are a logical extension of what we've already been doing.

To some extent, it's the way we do things and the means behind the outcomes we've achieved. In some cases, we're thinking about taking those capabilities and forming new companies around them.

There are areas in healthcare that are so new that it is advantageous to get into joint ventures to help us understand what those businesses might mean to us in the future.

Much of what we're doing is an "opportunity assessment" of areas that aren't near term or adjacent to our existing and core business model. Ultimately, we're getting into those relationships through some sort of joint venture with another organization that is skilled in a particular area.

As a system like North Shore-LIJ grows, does it get harder to maintain the innovative edge?

It comes down to maintaining a culture where innovation matters while trying to be a bit more structured around it.

We examine ideas that enable our growth and enhance the structure around our current core capabilities. We take advantage of many opportunities that we believe will be fundamentally essential to the healthcare system of the future.

When we structure things this way, it becomes a lot easier to identify and evaluate the big innovation opportunities that are really going to change the system.

Our nimbleness as an exceptionally large organization makes us powerful, and what makes us flexible is we can very quickly identify what we think will be important. We do that by engaging our employees, but also by having a clear understanding of strategy. This allows us to be more successful than most. ●

Ambulatory Strength

An Interview with
**Deborah Schiff, Executive Director and Senior Vice President,
 Strategy and Business Development, North Shore-LIJ Health System**



Deborah Schiff

EDITORS' NOTE *Deborah Schiff is actively involved in the community, serving on the board of directors of the Girl Scouts of Nassau County, the Health and Welfare Council of Long Island, and the Energeia Partnership. In addition, she has worked with the Nassau County Department of Health to address healthcare disparities in the community. Schiff is a registered nurse and holds clinical and administrative degrees including a nursing diploma from Queens Hospital Center School of Nursing and a bachelor's degree in health administration from St. Joseph's College.*

Would you provide an overview of your role at North Shore-LIJ and the key areas you focus on?

The cornerstone of our ambulatory development has been physician alignment. My role is to develop strategies that effectively align physicians with our overall health system.

Also, I am responsible for creating venues of care that will become embedded in the communities in which we serve, thereby enhancing access to health system programs and services.

We're developing a full continuum of services in the ambulatory arena, which contributes to our overall strategy.

How closely is this tied to other aspects of the health system?

I work very closely with the physician leaders of our service lines. In addition, there is close alignment with our hospital acquisition strategy. As we integrate hospitals into the health system, we determine how we can build an ambulatory network that supports those hospitals and the key services they provide. As the shift from inpatient to outpatient care is taking place, we're building an ambulatory network that allows as much care as possible to remain in the community.

How do you maintain an innovative culture at the size and scale of North Shore-LIJ?

In order to remain relevant in this healthcare environment, we must come up with unique ways to create multiple, coordinated access points, and we have to find appropriate partners with which to do so.

Although the cornerstone of building our ambulatory network to date has been physician alignment through employment, we are utilizing other alignment strategies to partner with physicians. Joint ventures align physicians through partnership or joint ownership in entities such as ambulatory surgery centers. Our ambulatory expansion includes establishing outpatient facilities that allow consumers to receive healthcare in the communities where they live and work. Urgent Care is an example of a program we are rapidly expanding to respond to the consumer demands to bring more services out of the hospital and into the community. We are opening one to two urgent care centers per month with plans for 60 centers within the next two years. Technology will also play an important role in managing the health of the population as we create linkages between providers and between patients and their providers.

With so much talk concerning the healthcare challenges we face, can you remain optimistic?

I can, because we are making a great effort to stay ahead of the curve and we are leading the transformation in healthcare.

It's about being early to market with the understanding that there is a shift as to where services are provided. Our hospitals remain crucial, but primarily for the care of the critically ill. We also must create new venues of care critical to managing health and the early detection of disease.

The ambulatory network is the backbone of our structure as we move forward in a more complex healthcare environment.

What do you tell young people about careers in healthcare?

I tell them that healthcare is dynamic and that virtually any career that one seeks can be had in the healthcare industry. ●