

Healthcare and Education

An Interview with Melissa Ceriale,
Cornell Institute for Healthy Futures, Montefiore Medicine

EDITORS' NOTE *Melissa Ceriale is a Founding Advisory Member of the new Cornell Institute for Healthy Futures, and she has been a member of the Board of Trustees of Montefiore Health System since 2013. Upon completing her degree at Michigan State University's School of Hospitality Business, Ceriale had a sales career with Marriott Hotels & Resorts, followed by 10 years as the principal of Prospect Design & Build, LLC.*



Melissa Ceriale

ORGANIZATION BRIEF *As the academic health system and University Hospital for Albert Einstein College of Medicine, Montefiore (Montefiore.org) is nationally recognized for clinical excellence—breaking new ground in research, training the next generation of healthcare leaders, and delivering science-driven, patient-centered care. Montefiore is ranked among the top hospitals nationally and regionally by U.S. News & World Report. For more than 100 years, they have been innovating new treatments, new procedures, and new approaches to patient care, producing stellar outcomes and raising the bar for health systems in the region and around the world.*

You've been involved in many causes for a long time. Will you talk about what drives that passion?

My husband, John, and I are hard-working people who came from nothing, and we have been incredibly fortunate with the results of our hard work. I'm still raising four children, so raising children who aren't growing up as we did and showing them the need to be good citizens to the rest of the world has been a huge focus for us over the past decade.

The only way that I know to do this is to show them by example, so we became committed to taking what we've been given and being responsible with it by helping others that haven't had the same level of fortune. That involves more than just money; it includes advocacy and opportunity.

With so much need, do you focus on specific areas to make the strongest impact or do you try to address a broad range of issues?

We learned early on that we can help this world one person at a time. When one can change the trajectory of a person or break a

bad cycle, one can shift the dynamics. Advocacy is everything. Do I have what I have because I deserve it? No, I've worked hard, but I've also been incredibly lucky. It's my responsibility to pay it forward and be a voice for those who don't have one.

What are your key areas of focus and how critical is it to track impact with metrics?

What brought me to Montefiore is the impact they are having, along with their long-term strategy. This place has had the vision of shifting from a fee-

for-service to a capitated model for a long time. This means that the goal is to keep our patients healthy and out of our hospitals. It's a bit different than most other organizations at this point. Eighty-five percent of the patients at Montefiore are on some type of government pay so putting our dollars into this organization has incredible impact. Yes, the metrics are there at both macro and micro levels. Lowered drug costs for diabetic patients with healthy food choices, dropping teen pregnancy rates in high schools, top transplantation success rates due to compliance—the list goes on.

As a family foundation, we've focused on healthcare and education. John has helped fund an institute at Cornell that marries management (the School of Hospitality Administration) with labor relations (the School of Industrial and Labor Relations). I have helped to fund an institute at Cornell that marries healthcare with design and hospitality to address the future of healthcare delivery.

Our major giving at this point in time, however, is focused on population health in the Bronx and how we can create huge impacts, especially in this wildly uncertain landscape in terms of what is going to happen on a federal funding level. The goal is to show what this healthcare system is doing for population health and driving down costs while the world is clamoring to understand how healthcare costs are spinning out of control.

You just mentioned a few of the unknowns that healthcare is facing. Are you optimistic that the challenges can be overcome, and how critical is it to create an understanding about the type of cutting-edge solutions that are happening at institutions like Montefiore?

One of the things I've become deeply involved with here are the school-based health

clinics. A doctor who did a fellowship here 20 years ago looked at healthcare needs in a classroom. From what he learned, we now have school-based health clinics so that a child's full spectrum of healthcare needs are being met in their school on a daily basis.

For instance, statistically, only 15 percent of children in the Bronx get dental care, and dental care alone is a major predictor for lifelong health outcomes—heart disease, diabetes, and dementia to name a few, not to mention lost seat time or poor attention span in the short run. Now we provide these kids with dental care right in their school setting.

We're delivering vaccinations and psychological care. If a child has a sore throat, they can get an instant strep test so a parent doesn't necessarily have to be called to leave work. In this population, this sometimes determines whether they keep their jobs or if they're thrown into a homeless cycle. We're also in high schools where we have been able to drop pregnancy rates by over 50 percent.

We're reducing societal cost by keeping these families from having to use emergency rooms at night or on the weekends when there is no doctor available after work hours. This teaches children, from a very early age, what their health means and what they should come to expect.

Do you see healthcare and education as interrelated?

This is what population health is all about—it's not just about someone's teeth or their heart; it's also about their financial stability and financial education, as well as their classroom education. It's about their personal health, their safety, and their security.

Montefiore is looking at this from every level, through community services, healthcare, and education—it's not just a lone-wolf effort.

In order to be successful in these efforts, how important is the commitment from the leadership team?

It's one of the things I love most about being on this particular board. We have individuals here who are socially mission driven, and it's fantastic to work with people like this. They care deeply about the health of this community. They are committed to helping everyone, regardless of ability to pay or who one is. As a philanthropist, it's also really exciting to work with an organization that is outstanding on so many different levels. ●