

A Community-Based Model

An Interview with Thomas McGinn, M.D.,
Deputy Physician-in-Chief and Senior Vice President, Ambulatory Services, Northwell Health

EDITORS' NOTE Dr. Thomas McGinn oversees all physician network operations for Northwell Health's growing medical group, Northwell Health Physician Partners. He works closely with and coordinates Northwell's clinical service lines, Premium IPA, Clinical Joint Ventures, Large Physician Group Medical Operations and Ambulatory Facility Response. Previously, he was senior vice president and executive director of medicine for the health system,



Thomas McGinn

responsible for managing the activities of the Department of Medicine. Dr. McGinn, who also serves as chair of medicine at Zucker School of Medicine, joined Northwell after serving as chief of the Division of General Internal Medicine at Mount Sinai Medical Center. In addition, he served as vice president of alliance development at Mount Sinai, helping to develop relationships and partnerships with other institutions and large medical practices throughout the metropolitan area. Dr. McGinn is a diplomate of the American Board of Internal Medicine and a fellow of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland. He has published extensively in the areas of evidence-based medicine (EBM), medical education and clinical research. Dr. McGinn earned his medical degree from SUNY Downstate College of Medicine in Brooklyn and completed his residency in internal medicine at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine/Bronx Municipal Hospital Center. He also received a Master of Public Health degree from Columbia University.

How do you define the Northwell Health difference?

There are many pieces that go into it. While our health system has been in existence since the early 1990s, we're relatively new compared to some of the more established hospitals and health systems in Manhattan, and this makes us more innovative and focused. We've always had the vision of being an integrated network from A to Z and we don't have this long history of a big academic center to distract us from that focus.

Our focus is on being an integrated health system that delivers high-quality, well-integrated care at all our facilities. It's a different philosophy. We have a more creative, innovative way of thinking about healthcare. Northwell is a flatter

organization that's really coordinated and integrated in neighborhoods with small community hospitals, medium-sized hospitals and a vast network of ambulatory centers. It's a much broader community-based model.

Will you provide an overview of your main areas of focus?

I'm a general internist and a primary care doctor by training and my area of interest has always been integrated, high-quality, evidenced-based care for every community that I serve.

Most of my early work was with underserved communities in the Bronx. I was also in Harlem for 10 years when I was at Mount Sinai, looking at ways to increase access to high-quality primary and evidence-based care.

Today, I overlook a vast network of 4,000 physicians and all of the clinical service lines. I am focused on how we create seamless integration across this complex health system. Many patients need to move from their primary care physician to sub-specialists and should feel that this is all coordinated and connected. If they have a minor health problem, they may be fine getting treated at an urgent care facility, but if they have a serious illness or injury, they may need care in a hospital. Regardless of where they are treated, all these pieces need to be connected. We want patients to feel that they have a unified team watching over them and that they're getting the best evidence-based care.

There are networks of integrated health systems now across the entire United States. All of these systems are a patchwork of hospitals and other entities that have joined together over the past decade or so with different cultures and different ways of doing things.

At Northwell, we are creating very high standards in clinical care and integration and we are moving all of these components so that they work seamlessly together. My focus is on taking all of these pieces and making them function together.

Northwell Health is a purpose-driven organization. Its CEO, Michael Dowling, has taken a lead in focusing on gun violence prevention and has asked other healthcare leaders and health systems to get engaged and help address this critical issue. What has made this issue a focus for Northwell Health?

Michael and I are very close and we are very passionate about this. I worked in Chicago for three years before medical school and did a lot of work in gang violence and was devastated to see it up close and personal.

This initiative is such a great example of how Michael leads. He leads through inspiration and when he takes on challenges, he sets down a target and then pulls us all toward that target. He put down this target on reducing gun violence and I was so happy to see him do it. It speaks to who we are, how we think and what we're doing.

When Michael asked me to champion this effort, we recognized that the nation's health system is now a group of systems with large platforms touching thousands of communities. We want to create the playbook for reducing gun violence by addressing it as a public health epidemic, not as a way to take guns away from people. When we create that playbook, we can then share it with others as a guide for dealing with issues such as preparedness for active shooters and how to work with schools in our communities so we can talk to kids about gun safety as well as parents about the importance of locking up their guns. It will also provide guidance for empowering our mental health providers across tremendously large, diverse communities to tap into issues around depression, suicide and gun availability.

We have a huge platform. If we can figure out how to do this in a smart way that's not politically explosive, share those best practices with other big health systems across the United States, and reduce gun violence by just 2 percent, that's a huge number of people you're touching.

Have you been happy with the engagement from Northwell Health's workforce in this effort?

We are the biggest private employer in New York State and the positive response from our workforce has been heartwarming. Everyone is asking how they can help, from our security officers who carry weapons, to our nurses and trauma surgeons who see the victims in the ER, to our psychiatrists who are helping some of the victims of violence and the anxiety that surrounds the aftermath of those shootings. Northwell Health is truly making a difference. ●