

## **Jim Jerzak Interview**

### **1. What is the best piece of leadership advice you've ever received?**

I have a little different perspective on this question than perhaps others you may interview. I started out for many years as a full time practicing family physician, and as such, had no formal leadership training. Most physicians who, by nature of their positions are often called upon in some capacity to be leaders, whether by their organization, their clinic, or their practice. I was no different, serving in a variety of informal leadership roles over the years.

However, when Bellin Health embarked on its transformation to Team-Based Care, I found myself in a more formal leadership role, as physician lead for Team Based Care. In this role, I had the opportunity to put into practice the leadership skills I had seen demonstrated over the years -- try to be optimistic and positive, engage those you lead in helping develop new processes as much as possible, and don't be afraid to take on challenges you are not comfortable with. And probably the most important advice - be open minded. Innovation happens when minds are open to new ideas.

### **2. If you could go back in time, what is one piece of leadership advice you would give your future self?**

Get involved, think about getting some formal leadership training through the AAFP or other organizations, and don't be afraid to make yourself uncomfortable. Push yourself. Getting out of your comfort zone is the best way to set a course for continuous improvement.

### **3. What is one leadership experience, situation, or scenario that you've experienced that you wish everyone in family medicine (students, residents, physicians) could experience?**

Bellin's transformation to advanced Team-Based Care has led to a lot of positive experiences. One of my favorites is observing what health care workers in different roles on our team accomplish when they are empowered to do their jobs at the very top of their skill set, and to use critical thinking skills to figure out ways to better help our patients and their team members - whether it's our Certified Medical Assistants and LPNs developing meaningful bonds with patients due to their intense involvement in the office visit (including documentation), or RNs that now see patients for things such as Annual Medicare Wellness visits or blood pressure follow up visits, or our Advanced Practice Clinicians sharing patient care responsibilities with our docs. A fully engaged and empowered medical team, with true team culture, is a beautiful thing to see in action. I hope everyone gets a chance to experience that in their careers.

### **4. Who are your mentors and what did you learn from them to become the physician/leader that you are today?**

I don't think of having a specific mentor, I think in terms of all of the things I have learned from a long series of role models over the years. Interesting, most of them are family docs. They range from the family docs I did rotations with in medical school - those family practice experiences were the highlight of my training. These were not trained leaders,

these were practicing docs, on the front lines of health care. I learned so much about compassionate care and professionalism just by watching them in their daily work. My residency director helped model leadership skills in a practical way. I have been in practice with 3 other family docs for over 30 years, and have learned much from them. Finally, the administrative leadership of our Team-Based Care project has taught me the nuts and bolts of actual project leadership. I think our professional careers are a sum total of all of the interactions we have with people in all types of roles.

### **5. Why did you choose family medicine and what's your favorite aspect of it?**

I came for the variety, I stayed for the relationships. What I mean is, as a student, the variety of a family physician's practice was so appealing. I remember one day seeing a newborn in the hospital, and my next patient was a 102 year old in a nursing home. What other type of doc can claim that type of experience? As the years went on though, I came to value more and more, relationships with my patients and their families. Its like a cliché, but it's true, I am seeing the babies of the families I delivered. I am not sure you can appreciate how meaningful that is until you experience it.

### **6. What does leadership mean to you?**

No matter what your role, lead by example. Especially as a physician, your peers and your teams will look to you. Transformation to Team-Based Care is out of the comfort zone for some docs. Those who keep a positive attitude and model team culture do much better in a team based world. As I mentioned above, be open to change.

### **7. What is the most memorable experience you have had when dealing with a patient?**

Gosh, there are so many. As my practice has gotten older, I have had more patients develop serious problems, and sad to say, more are dying. I am struck by the strength and dignity of both patients and their loved ones going through this process. Just this morning, I called a patient I have seen since her daughters, now in their mid 20's, were born. 3 days ago the daughters lost their dad to prostate cancer, in his mid 50's. The strength and resolve that the wife and the daughters demonstrated through this ordeal was breathtaking. To be able to get to know, and in some small way to try to help such incredible people - who could ask for a more fulfilling calling?

### **8. What qualities make a great leader in family medicine? How have you taken these qualities into your practice and community outreach?**

Lead by example, teach students when you can, keep empathy front and center of all encounters with patients - those are all things that show leadership by example. Family docs, due to the breadth of training and practice, make great leaders in clinics and systems. Be bold, take on leadership roles and do not compromise your values along the way. The Team Based Care leadership role has been a challenge, since that type of role was new to me, and it was challenging since I am still practicing clinical medicine nearly full time. However, we have unique skills as physicians, and family physicians in particular, that lend themselves well to a wide variety of leadership roles.

**9. Who or what inspired you to pursue family medicine?**

For some reason, I always knew I wanted to be a family doc. Maybe it was my first grade teacher who said "Your handwriting is so bad you should be a doctor". Maybe it was seeing the Marcus Welby show way back when. (google it, youngsters) Who knows? I just know I wanted to do this as far back as I can remember. And it has been every bit as gratifying as I had hoped it would be.

**10. What piece of advice would you give to your younger self? To a medical student interested in, or a new family medicine resident?**

I would recommend that students thinking about a career in medicine ask themselves -Can I maintain a positive and caring attitude for every patient encounter, no matter how tired, busy, or far behind I am? If they can answer that question yes, they are well suited for this job. As for residents, the advice I would give is to always remember when seeing patients that that particular encounter may be just one of 20 or 30 or more that day for you, but for the patient, they may very well remember that encounter the rest of their lives. Make it a good one!