

# THOUGHT LEADERSHIP PROFILES

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE PEOPLE AND IDEAS THAT DRIVE MEANINGFUL CHANGE IN BUSINESS

## SPOTLIGHT

### NEWT GINGRICH



*Since retiring from Congress, Newt Gingrich has worked extensively on the issues of health and health-care, devoting the majority of his time to advocating a transformation of the entire system.*

*In 2003, he founded the Center for Health Transformation, a collaboration of public and private sector leaders dedicated to the creation of a 21st Century Intelligent Health System that saves lives and saves money.*

*Honored most recently by Modern Healthcare's annual poll as the 5th Most Powerful Person in Healthcare for 2006, Newt Gingrich is widely recognized as a transformational leader, unparalleled in his ability to create and lead successful large-scale change. As the architect of the Contract with America, he led the Republican Party to victory in 1994, capturing the majority in the U.S. House for the first time in forty years. Under his leadership, Congress passed transformational legislation including welfare reform, the first balanced budget in a generation, funding to strengthen our defense capabilities, and the first tax cuts in sixteen years.*

*During his twenty years in Congress, Speaker Gingrich was committed to improving America's healthcare system, co-chairing the Republican Task Force on Health for four years prior to becoming Speaker. Under his leadership as Speaker, Medicare was improved, investment in medical research was dramatically increased, and FDA reform was enacted to allow for quicker approval and access to new medicines for those with terminal and degenerative illnesses.*

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**Q** *Do you envision any role for health insurers in the industry's transformation?*

**A** Health insurers can and will have a role if they provide value to patients. We are strong believers in maximum transparency of cost and quality outcomes to determine which actors perform the best. As with any industry some plans are more effective than others. On April 8th, I hosted an event on Capitol Hill with Congressman Michael Burgess M.D. that featured four highly innovative health plans that have actually delivered better health outcomes at lower cost. The video and all associated materials from that event are on our website. At the Center for Health Transformation we are fortunate to work with some of the most innovative physicians, health plans, policy-makers, and IT companies in America. We believe in learning from the best and sharing that knowledge with others so as to improve quality everywhere.

Pundits (including me) have been writing about the new consumer in health care for 15 years, and it appears that they're finally starting to get here. This is seen most in online activity in searching for health information, but also in huge demand for better service from health care as a whole. When Kevin Trudeau is on the NY Times bestseller list, you know

there's something wrong with the marketing of conventional health care.

The next phase is consumers wanting control over their own health care information, and health insurers (and eventually providers) are going to have to provide it, and layer useful service over the top. At the moment WebMD Health is clearly the leader in providing that type of service to health insurers, but they're being quickly followed by a raft of technology companies filling all kinds of niches.

The challenge for health plans is that they're going to have to provide these "retail" services when their main sale is still "wholesale" to employers and via brokers. So the transition is not as much a change as an "add."

**Q** *If the technologies already exist to operationalize vital advances in health care, why aren't they being implemented?*

**A** Certainly the technology to operationalize medical health records is out there, and several pioneers are bringing healthcare into the 21st century. But there is an interoperability problem. Today's health IT systems lack the common technological data standards to exchange information. Although more and more physicians' offices

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and hospitals have modernized their own healthcare delivery systems, they have built customized silos that are virtually unrecognizable to outside systems. With growing pressures to compete, a lack of incentive to share data, and the lack of interoperability standards to connect these systems, virtually all healthcare providers choose not to interconnect their systems with others.

The tipping point will only occur when a unified set of open interoperability standards are created just as they have been created in other industries.

There is also an adoption problem. When a doctor or hospital uses an electronic health record or other information technologies—even if they are not interoperable with other systems—they deliver better care at lower costs. The vast majority of providers don't use and won't pay for the technology despite the benefits. We need to reform the way we pay for care so that we incentivize the adoption of these kinds of tools.

Until these obstacles are overcome, we will lack the necessary tools to get to a fully-paperless system.

**Q Which presidential candidate offers the best hope for meaningful healthcare reform?**

**A** I look forward to hearing more specific details on health care policy from both candidates. I would like to see one entire debate devoted exclusively to how each candidate would pursue a 21st century intelligent health system for all Americans. Voters consistently place health care

as a top three issue. It deserves significant attention. My sense for now is that the outline of the McCain proposal is superior. His idea to provide generous refundable tax credits to Americans who do not get their health insurance from an employer is the right approach. McCain also emphasizes information technology to improve quality, speed, and accuracy. The Obama plan tends to rely more heavily on regulation, price controls, and bureaucracy which don't exactly have a track record of success in producing more choices of higher quality at lower cost. I would like to see both candidates talk more about health as a cultural problem rather than a financing problem.

**Q Do any State governments demonstrate an enlightened approach to healthcare reform?**

**A** The Georgia legislature just passed what we believe to be one of the most forward-looking health insurance reform bills in the country. Governor Perdue is expected to sign the bill in early May. The new law permits health plans to offer specific monetary rewards and incentives for healthy behaviors. It also removes premium taxes and allows individuals a state income tax deduction for the cost of High Deductible Health Plans. We believe this new law could result in coverage for up to a quarter of those currently uninsured in Georgia. Former Florida Governor Jeb Bush and current governor Charlie Crist also deserve credit for their work in pushing the

transparency sites **FloridaHealthFinder.gov** and **MyFloridaRx.com** which provides superb cost and quality information for every hospital in the state and the top 100 most commonly used prescription drugs. They have also been very bold with reforms to Medicaid that expand choice in plans and offer incentive account to people who engage in healthy behaviors.

**Q How and when will individuals be motivated to take responsibility for their own wellness?**

**A** We can all agree that what we have now has clearly failed. Rates of obesity and diabetes continue to skyrocket despite the fact that health care spending on an overall and per capita basis is higher every year. More money is not the answer. The answer is the promotion of healthier habits. The mayor of Oklahoma City Mike Cornett is a model in civic leadership on this issue. His new website:

**ThisCityIsGoingOnADiet.com** challenges residents to lose a collective 1 million pounds. Other successes include health plans that literally pay people to lose weight through cash, lower premiums, or lower deductibles. Personal financial incentives work. There is a wide variety of experiments in this area and we are always learning about newer and more effective ways to achieve healthier people. That is a very different goal than politicians dreaming up new ways to spend taxpayer money on programs that

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have no measurable positive effects on health status.

**Q** *Given your deep political background, can you be viewed as a credible, objective spokesperson for healthcare reform?*

**A** People are free to make decision about my work on any basis. I am very confident that if they take the time to read our materials and

watch our videos at **HealthTransformation.net** they will see that our solutions are tried and tested in the real world and truly provide better health outcomes at lower cost. This is a far cry from what is typically discussed in the current political arena where the loudest voices have ideological axes to grind and care about individual health outcomes secondarily, if at all. ●

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The Washington Times called him “the indispensable leader” and Time magazine, in naming him Man of the Year for 1995, said, “Leaders make things possible. Exceptional leaders make them inevitable. Newt Gingrich belongs in the category of the exceptional.”

Mr. Gingrich is currently a member of the Advisory Board for the Agency for Healthcare Quality and Research and sits on the Board of Regents at the National Library of Medicine. In addition, he co-chairs the National Commission for Quality Long Term Care. He has received numerous health and healthcare honors and awards, including:

- 1995 March of Dimes Georgian of the Year
- 1996 Georgia Breast Cancer Coalition Honoree
- 1996 Mental Health Association Advocacy Award
- 1997 Juvenile Diabetes Foundation Advocate of the Year
- 1998 American Association of Endocrinologists Patients Advocate of the Year

- 1998 American Diabetes Association Charles Best Medal (the highest non-medical award bestowed by the ADA)
- 1998 National Association of Community Health Centers Diabetes Healthcare Advocate of the Year
- 2001 Science Coalition’s Science Pioneer Award
- 2005 NCOA Health Quality Award (National Committee for Quality Assurance)
- 2005 National Minority Health Month Foundation Award for outstanding contributions to elimination of diabetes
- 2005 Louis Sullivan Award for his leadership and advocacy for the rapid adoption of health information technology (WEDI, the Workgroup for Electronic Data Interchange)
- 2005 HIMSS Advocacy Award for his leadership advancing information and management systems for the betterment of human health
- 2006 National Hispanic Youth Initiative Award for Leadership

Speaker Gingrich has authored numerous

health publications, columns and books, including *Saving Lives and Saving Money*, which describes the vision and principles of the Center for Health Transformation. His book *Winning the Future* includes key chapters on health and healthcare, based on his work at The Center. Speaker Gingrich and Center for Health Transformation CEO and President Nancy Desmond published *The Art of Transformation* in 2007, and 2008 brings another publication, *Real Change*, which devotes a chapter to the necessary changes in today’s healthcare system. ●