

This is a monthly series the Boston Business Journal will be featuring on diversity in business. If you have a column or story idea you'd like to submit, please forward your suggestion to BBJ Executive Editor George Donnelly at gdonnelly@bizjournals.com.

SPOTLIGHT

Eric H. Schultz

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About the author: Eric H. Schultz is president and chief executive officer of Harvard Pilgrim Health Care, the No. 1 private health plan in America, according to an annual ranking of the nation's best health plans by the National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA). Harvard Pilgrim is the only private health plan in the nation to be named No. 1 for member satisfaction and quality of care for nine consecutive years.

During his 26-year career, Schultz has taken an active role in defining and implementing changes leading to improvements and greater efficiencies in the financing and delivery of health care through greater consumer and physician engagement. Prior to joining Harvard Pilgrim, he was president and CEO of Fallon Community Health Plan, and held executive positions with CIGNA Healthcare, Prudential Healthcare and Nashville Healthcare Physician Group. Schultz was recently appointed as chairman of the board of AHIP.

Schultz holds an MBA in health career leadership from Yale University's School of Management, as well as a Bachelor of Science degree in biology and a Bachelor of Arts degree in economics from the University of Connecticut.

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My evolution on the road to inclusion

CEOs are uniquely positioned to influence the culture of their companies. When I came to Harvard Pilgrim almost three years ago, I put a lot of thought into what kind of influence and direction I wanted to bring to our organization. Ultimately, one primary focus was to continue on a path that has been evolving for me personally for many years now — one of inclusion. I decided to make inclusion a strategic initiative and a bigger part of the fabric of Harvard Pilgrim. I knew that in order to make this happen, I needed to make a personal commitment and become the owner of this initiative. So, I am.

Inclusion is a broad and encompassing word. And, it means different things to different people. For me, it means valuing differences and creating value through difference each day — with one another, our customers and in the community. This includes supporting organizations, initiatives and programs that promote and cultivate a diversity of skills and cultures that our region needs to flourish.

The first step we took was to conduct an assessment of our readiness to embrace an inclusion initiative on an enterprise-wide level. We hired an outside expert in corporate diversity, Global View Communications, which conducted the assessment with established criteria for judging our progress. I engaged my senior team, communicating the importance of the inclusion initiative company-wide and ensuring that we were all on the same page. I also created a leadership position, reporting to me, to ensure that we had an enterprise-wide scope and oversight. The initiative began to take hold.

Improving the quality and value of health care for the people and communities we serve is basic to the Harvard Pilgrim mission. And, it is so important to recognize that health care is not one size fits all. In health care, it is important that we not assume we understand the needs of our members. We serve diverse populations with unique values, languages and cultures. This presents challenges and opportunities at the same time. We began to outreach in different ways — through focus groups, advisory groups and social media to more fully understand the values and needs of our various constituents. Then, we began to outline a strategy for reaching out to our business partners and including them in our work.

What kinds of things have we done? As one of our projects, we contracted with Toronto-based Essential Accessibility to offer amazing website improvements for those with physical disabilities. Harvard Pilgrim is a founding member of the International

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Disability Community Involvement Initiative, and the first health plan in the Northeast to offer these tools.

Essential Accessibility web tools are now available on our website and offers onscreen keyboard and hands-free movement tacking for those with physical limitations. It offers page reading capabilities for those with reading difficulties, and technical support in several languages.

Additionally, Essential Accessibility's free software can be downloaded from our website and used on other websites. Members can take it with them to help improve their access to the Web — and, more importantly, to maximize the value they can get from their health insurance.

I knew from previous experience that businesses sometimes get caught up in meeting short-term financial goals and miss opportunities to further their own corporate missions. I was reminded of what we learned in the early stages of

the HIV/AIDS crisis when conventional wisdom held that providing health coverage to AIDS patients would drastically increase premium rates. As we know, this turned out not to be the case — in fact, quite the contrary.

Today in 2012, a current piece of conventional wisdom is that coverage for transgender treatments is cost prohibitive. While some insurers, like Harvard Pilgrim, have covered treatment related to this condition, few have covered all related services, including surgery. But as with HIV/AIDS, further, early analysis has shown this thinking to be erroneous, and it has been borne out in the experience of some of our large employers who have begun to offer coverage for transgender surgery. At Harvard Pilgrim, we have begun offering coverage for sexual reassignment and related surgeries to our staff.

Our efforts to date have been recognized by the Human Rights Campaign, (HRC) America's largest civil rights organization that is working to achieve lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender equality. We recently earned a 100 percent ranking on the group's annual Corporate Equality Index.

I personally have learned a lot from local diversity and inclusion leaders. I have had the privilege to meet with early adopters like Bob Rivers, president and COO of Eastern Bank, to better understand the programs at his company. And, we've also found the Commonwealth Compact at the University of Massachusetts' Benchmarks Survey an important measurement to help our business achieve greater inclusion.

I believe that Harvard Pilgrim has made a good early start at inclusion both inside and outside the company. For our own employees, we host staff celebrations for ethnic holidays, offer mentoring opportunities, employee resource groups for diverse staff, and benefits for domestic partners. Through our Foundation, we consult with organizations in our three-state service area on culturally competent health care. To bring inclusion to the next level, we have also made it part of our three-year business planning cycle, developing a strategy and quantifying goals to measure our progress. I remain committed to personally leading this effort over the years to come and building a culture which brings a strong internal understanding and appreciation of inclusion in order to maximize value for the ever-changing populations of Americans we serve.