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Crossroads

With Dr. Richard Merkin

The unique perspective of
Richard Merkin, M.D., as Innovation,
Technology, Legislation and Care
Delivery come together to impact
the future of population health



Charting New Horizons: The Convergence of Medicine, Technology and Humanity



In a world that seems to shift beneath our feet, the realm of medicine and healthcare remains an anchor — but not one that is static. In the intertwining fibers of healthcare, innovation and the human experience, we find ourselves at the cusp of monumental change. As I ponder the state of our industry and the broader world, I’m struck by the convergence of technology, empathy and science that is reshaping the contours of patient care.

“It’s not just about the marvels of medicine, but the soul of it: the poignant narratives of patients reclaiming their lives, the relentless pursuit of clinicians challenging the status quo and the genius of researchers pushing the boundaries of what’s possible.”

~ Richard Merkin, M.D.



In this issue, we delve into the nuances of this evolving landscape, inviting you on a journey through the lens of healthcare professionals, patients and innovators. It’s not just about the marvels of medicine, but the soul of it: the poignant narratives of patients reclaiming their lives, the relentless pursuit of clinicians challenging

the status quo and the genius of researchers pushing the boundaries of what’s possible. As technology continues to advance at lightning speed, we’re also reminded of the importance of the personal connections that remain irreplaceable and vital.

While we celebrate the breakthroughs and success stories, we also acknowledge the challenges that lie ahead. The field of healthcare is at an inflection point. The questions we grapple with today, from ethical considerations in technology to the equitable distribution of care, will shape the legacy we leave for future generations.

A stylized, handwritten signature in white ink, consisting of a large, flowing 'M' and a smaller 'R'.

Richard Merkin, M.D.
President and CEO of HPN

Richard Merkin, M.D.
Healthcare visionary Richard Merkin, M.D., has spent the last 40 years implementing a successful, workable business model to address the needs and challenges of affordable managed healthcare.

■ Feature Story



The DNA Revolution: Dr. Marvin Caruthers’ Journey to the Merkin Prize



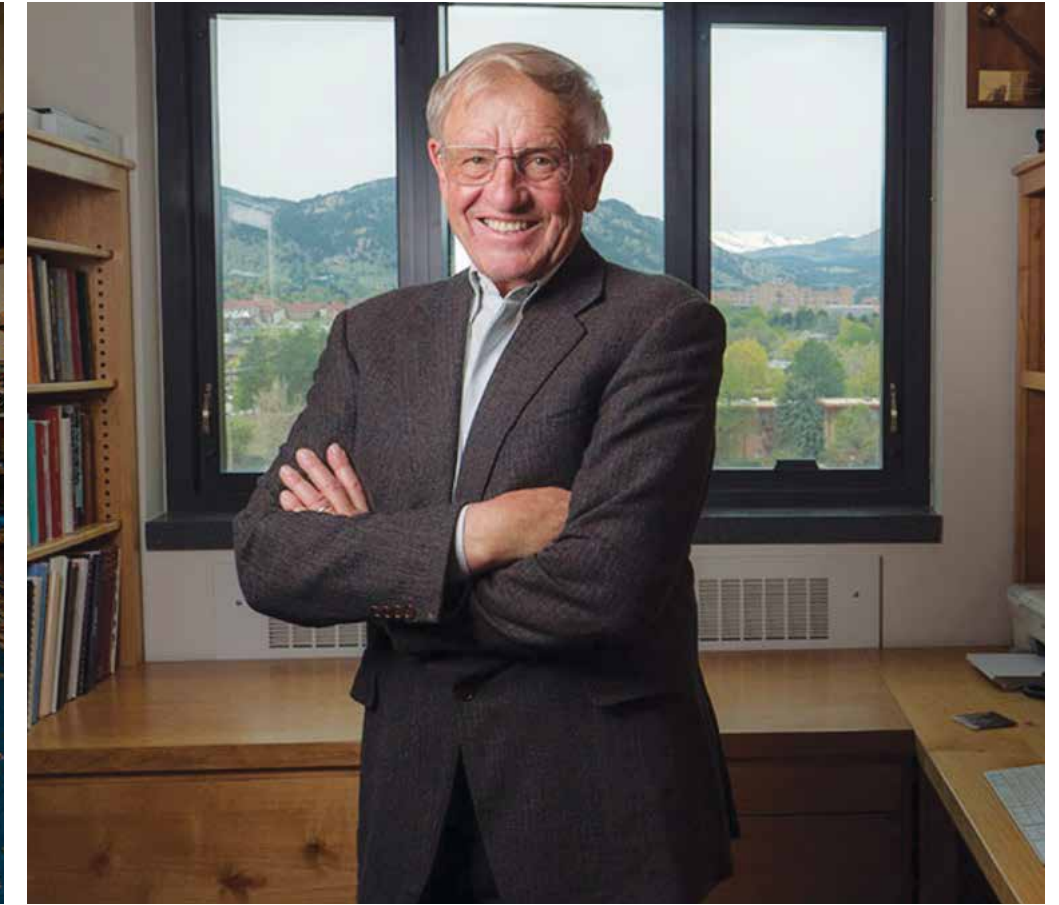
“

The Merkin Prize celebrates pioneers, and Marvin is undoubtedly one of the brightest stars in this galaxy.”

~ Dr. Richard Merkin, President and CEO
of Heritage Provider Network

The DNA Revolution: Dr. Marvin Caruthers’ Journey to the Merkin Prize

The Indelible
Footprint of Modern
Molecular Medicine
and an Unsung Hero



The Dawn of DNA Synthesis and Modern Biomedicine

In the annals of history, some innovations stand out as turning points for humanity. The efficient synthesis of nucleic acids is one such beacon. Before the 1980s, the world of genetics was akin to a vast ocean, navigated by sailors without compasses. Today, it's a well-charted territory, with precise maps, largely thanks to Marvin H. Caruthers, Ph.D., of the University of Colorado, Boulder. His profound impact on the course of biomedical technology recently earned him the esteemed Richard N. Merkin Prize in Biomedical Technology.

AN UNSUNG HERO: The Caruthers lab is designed to generate and manipulate DNA. (Photo courtesy of Marvin Caruthers, Ph.D.); In 2006, Dr. Marvin H. Caruthers (far left of President George W. Bush) became a National Medal of Science Laureate, for his work with DNA. (Photo courtesy of George W. Bush Presidential Library); Caruthers of the University of Colorado, Boulder.

An Iowan's Lifelong Chemistry Quest

Born in Des Moines, Iowa, in 1940, Caruthers' love affair with science began in the playgrounds and classrooms of his hometown. Fascination took root when his parents gifted him a chemistry set in third grade. This was the flame that ignited his ardor for the world of molecules and reactions. By the time he reached Iowa State University, Caruthers was already on a path that would see him redefine the genetic world.

His academic trajectory took him to Northwestern University, under the discerning eye of Robert Letsinger, Ph.D. Here, Caruthers grappled with the intricacies of nucleotides, the building blocks of DNA and RNA. Given the methods of that era, nucleotide synthesis was a Herculean task. "We'd be lucky to get a tiny fraction synthesized in months," he once mused.

The Drive for Change

In 1973, a new chapter began for Caruthers as he joined the University

of Colorado, Boulder. The academic environment was vibrant, filled with bright minds. Yet, not many saw the same vision as Caruthers. Most were content with existing DNA synthesis methods, skeptical of the need or feasibility for a rapid breakthrough.

But Caruthers was not one to be swayed by skepticism. Teaming up with his dedicated graduate student, Mark Matteucci, and a brilliant postdoc, Serge Beaucage, Ph.D., Caruthers embarked on a journey to revolutionize DNA



“Dr. Caruthers’ work forms the bedrock of so many medical breakthroughs we take for granted today.”

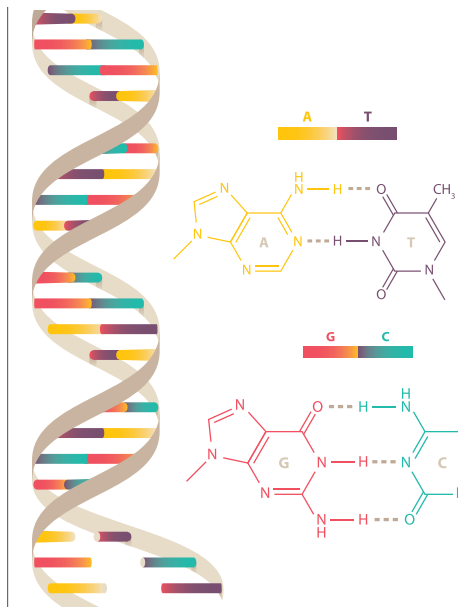
~ Dr. Richard Merkin,
President and CEO of
Heritage Provider Network

synthesis. Together, they identified that “controlled pore glass,” a type of porous silica glass, was the perfect scaffold for DNA synthesis. This insight, although seemingly simple, revolutionized the field, reducing months of painstaking labor to just a few days.

The Birth of the Merkin Prize

In recognizing profound advancements in the biomedical field, the Merkin Family Foundation, in tandem with the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard, launched the Richard N. Merkin Prize in Biomedical Technology. This prize, designed to spotlight groundbreaking contributions to human health and medicine, saw Caruthers as the clear choice for its inaugural award.

Dr. Richard Merkin, the visionary behind the award, commented: “Dr. Caruthers’ work forms the bedrock of so many medical breakthroughs we take for granted today. The Merkin Prize celebrates pioneers, and Marvin is undoubtedly one of the brightest stars in this galaxy.” The prize is more than just an honor — it’s a testament to Caruthers’ relentless drive.



The Impact of Caruthers’ Invention

The power of Caruthers’ innovation extends beyond the walls of research labs. His technique is at the core of several monumental achievements:

- 1. Genetic Sequencing:** His DNA synthesis technique became a cornerstone for modern genome sequencing methods, mapping out the intricate designs of life.
- 2. Pharmaceutical Development:** Tailored drug therapies, especially in the realm of cancer treatment, owe their existence to Caruthers’ work. By understanding the genetic makeup of tumors, therapies can be designed to target them specifically.
- 3. Disease Detection:** From HIV to COVID-19, rapid diagnostic tests often harness the power of DNA synthesis to detect pathogens.

The real magic of Caruthers’ invention lies not just in its technical prowess, but in its democratizing power. By making DNA synthesis faster and more accessible, he leveled the playing field, inviting more minds to delve into the intricacies of genetics, thus catalyzing countless breakthroughs.

The Legacy and the Future

As the biomedical world pauses to celebrate Caruthers, there’s a collective acknowledgment of his immeasurable contribution. His journey, marked by curiosity, resilience and tenacity, serves as an enduring lesson for young scientists.

While the Richard N. Merkin Prize honors one of the luminaries of biomedical technology, it also sets the stage for the future. As the nominations for 2024 gear up, there’s eager anticipation to see who will follow in Caruthers’ footsteps.

The story of Marvin Caruthers is a potent reminder of the immense possibilities when one dares to challenge the status quo. As we stand at the crossroads of genetic research and medical advancement, it’s the spirit of pioneers like him that will light the path ahead.



CELEBRATING INNOVATION:
**The Inaugural Merkin Prize
in Biomedical Technology**

Dr. Richard Merkin (right) presented Marvin Caruthers, Ph.D., (left) with the Merkin Prize at a ceremony at the Broad Institute in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Oct. 4, 2023. Photo by Erik Jacobs, Anthem Multimedia.

A

t a recent, grand celebration accompanied by a gala dinner, Dr. Richard Merkin alongside the esteemed team from the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard, bestowed upon Marvin Caruthers, Ph.D., the very first Richard N. Merkin Prize in Biomedical Technology. The day was marked with commendations, recognizing Caruthers' transformative contributions to the field of DNA synthesis.

Voices of Appreciation

The weight of Caruthers' contributions wasn't lost on Dr. Merkin, who expressed, "The biotech landscape we see today would be remarkably different if not for Dr. Caruthers. His work symbolizes the transformative technologies in life sciences that genuinely touch patients' lives and further healthcare for all."

"This honor could have easily gone to numerous deserving colleagues. It fills me with immense pride to be the chosen one."

~ Marvin Caruthers, Ph.D., Distinguished Professor, University of Colorado, Boulder

Sharing the limelight, Caruthers humbly remarked, "This honor could have easily gone to numerous deserving colleagues. It fills me with immense pride to be the chosen one. The work we've been celebrated for has found resonance in biology and biochemistry labs worldwide."



Dr. Richard Merkin at a ceremony at the Broad Institute in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Oct. 4, 2023. Photo by Erik Jacobs, Anthem Multimedia.



From left to right: Marvin Caruthers, Ph.D., Dr. Richard Merkin, Todd Golub, M.D., and Harold Varmus, M.D., in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Oct. 4, 2023. Photo by Erik Jacobs, Anthem Multimedia.

“

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~ Dr. Richard Merkin,
President and CEO
of Heritage Provider Network

The Merkin Prize: A Deeper Dive

This inaugural prize has been made possible by the Merkin Family Foundation and is overseen by the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard. The 2023 Merkin Prize garnered over 50 nominations of cutting-edge technologies and the brilliant minds behind them. The decision-making process involved an elite committee of eight, including leading scientific figures from both academia and the industry.

Harold Varmus, M.D., the Nobel laureate and jury chair, emphasized the

uniqueness of the Merkin Prize, saying, “While there’s no dearth of awards in biomedical science, only a handful truly celebrate technology. It’s evident to us in the field that technology is the wind beneath the wings of discovery. The Merkin Prize celebrates technologies that have significantly shaped public health and patient care.”

Todd Golub, M.D., director and a founding core member of the Broad Institute, lauded Dr. Merkin’s forward-thinking philanthropy, comparing him to Eli Broad,

and highlighting how vital their contributions have been to scientific advancements.

A Glimpse Into the Future

The day’s festivities also featured an enlightening science symposium. Attendees were privileged to hear from luminaries, including Caruthers, who shared insights into their work. Professor Xiao Wang, Ph.D., from MIT and the Broad Institute, spoke about the potential of introducing chemical synthesis in mRNA therapeutics and expressed gratitude

to the Merkin fellowship, which facilitated their early forays into DNA and RNA synthesis.

As the curtains drew on this eventful day, the focus subtly shifted to the horizon, with nominations now opening for the 2024 Merkin Prize in Biomedical Technology.

For further details on the Merkin Prize or to submit a nomination, please visit merkinprize.org.



Shaping the Future: Dr. Richard Merkin Commends the 2023 Heritage Institute Graduates at USC

In a memorable ceremony, Dr. Richard Merkin, the visionary founder and CEO of Heritage Provider Network (HPN), applauded the achievements of 46 remarkable HPN employees. These individuals have recently graduated from the esteemed Heritage Institute of Clinical Studies (HICS), facilitated in collaboration with the University of Southern California (USC).

Since its inception in 2017, this distinguished certification in population health management has empowered HPN employees with the knowledge and tools for enhancing patient clinical outcomes, paving the way for professional growth, and offering continuing education accreditation for MA, LVN, RN, MD and DO levels.

In a heartfelt message, Dr. Merkin expressed, “The only difference between ordinary and extraordinary is that little extra, and that little extra is represented by all of you here today. I want to celebrate you, thank you and very much congratulate you for what you’ve accomplished. I’m so proud of you.”

HPN’s collaboration with USC has resonated across the healthcare domain. The program’s graduates are renowned for driving enhanced healthcare solutions for vast population segments nationwide. Between 2019 and 2023 alone, over 700 HPN team members have been certified.

Howard Hu, M.D., M.P.H., Sc.D., Flora L. Thornton Chair of Population and Public Health Sciences at Keck School of Medicine of USC, shed light on the significance of the program: “This collaboration between HPN and USC does many things. Most importantly, it provides absolute state-of-the-art education about the kinds of medicine that our healthcare professionals need to know as we embark into 21st century medicine.”

Echoing this sentiment, Shubha Kumar, Ph.D., M.P.H., director of Online Program Initiatives, Department of Population and Public Health Sciences at the Keck School of Medicine of USC, emphasized, “It’s a unique opportunity between HPN and USC for us to have this program, as we are not only working on treating, but also directly improving, patient care. The students enrolled in this program are the healthcare providers who are really working on the front lines. To have providers increasingly trained in this space is a fantastic opportunity for all of us.”

The graduates have delved into various critical areas of study, including Alzheimer’s disease, hypertension, bipolar disorder and diabetes, to name a few.

Heno Yousefi, Pharm.D., a proud 2023 HICS graduate and clinical pharmacist at HPN, shared his excitement: “Congratulations to all my fellow ambitious, resilient and triumphant colleagues. We came, we studied, we conquered. By continuing our education and embracing a lifelong learning concept, we can stay at the forefront of patient care and make a lasting impact on our community.”

The evening concluded with a delightful dinner reception at the Town and Gown, where attendees commemorated achievements that resonate with the core value of the Heritage Institute of Clinical Studies: Virtus Orci – Clinical Power.

As Dr. Merkin touchingly summed up, “This program with USC has allowed all of our employees to have the opportunity



This program with USC has allowed all of our employees to have the opportunity to be special. I’m so grateful to all the people that are involved in this program. It just makes my heart swell.”

~ Dr. Richard Merkin,
President and CEO of
Heritage Provider Network

to be special. I’m so grateful to all the people that are involved in this program. It just makes my heart swell.”



HDMG Escorts Veteran, 90, on Honor Flight to Washington D.C.

High Desert Medical Group's outreach involves supporting local civic and volunteer projects, and backing the Antelope Valley's veterans as part of HDMG's commitment to its members and community.

This guidance was given several years ago to the HDMG social services team by the group's Medical Director, Charles Lim, M.D., and HDMG Administrator Rafael Gonzalez.

"We just need to be out in the community, and we need to go 100% for our veterans and senior citizens," Gonzalez said.

Part of the outreach included HDMG's partnership with the VA to provide urgent care in the community, and to support elder veterans' healthcare at the local California Department of Veterans assisted living facility, the William J. "Pete" Knight Veterans Home. HDMG has also backed local keystone service organizations like

Vets4Veterans and Coffee4Vets, earning recognition for its support.

The Antelope Valley region served by HDMG is home to tens of thousands of veterans, many of whom are members of the medical group. As a further show of its ongoing commitment to this population as well as local service providers, HDMG recognizes a local organization serving the community's veterans each year at its annual Senior Expo. This outreach is pivotal to HDMG's role as a community engagement leader, Gonzalez observed.

Dennis Anderson, a licensed clinical social worker and Army veteran, recently escorted an elder veteran comrade to Washington, D.C., as part of the national Honor Flight program. On the day of the veteran's 90th birthday, Anderson flew from Bakersfield Airport with Korean War era veteran Anthony Kitson. Joined by 100 other veterans, they were bound for a tour of every armed forces memorial in the nation's capital.

His travel companion, "Sensei Tony" Kitson, was one of the Antelope Valley's premier martial arts youth coaches for 28 years. As a young infantry soldier, he arrived in Okinawa 70 years prior. His recent 90th birthday festivities included a two-day tour of the memorials,



"We just need to be out in the community, and we need to go 100% for our veterans and senior citizens."

Honor Flight Kern County, a chapter of a nationwide program with 136 branches, was established to pay tribute to veterans of Kern County and nearby areas. HDMG's contribution to this cause involved Dennis Anderson's role as the community outreach representative to accompany the esteemed Kitson.

"It's an honor to work with Anthony Kitson," said volunteer Fabian Millan, reflecting the passion shared by over 50 guardian volunteers.

Some of these veterans, in their younger years, had received Purple Heart medals after confronting the horrors of the Vietnam War. Upon their return flight, each veteran was presented with a bag full of gratitude letters from loved ones and well-wishers.

Their return to Bakersfield was celebrated with loud cheers, flags waving, bands playing and a welcome that mirrored the homecoming parade many had missed decades ago.

courtesy of the nonprofit Honor Flights Kern County. The celebration was crowned with visits to Arlington National Cemetery and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

"It was the trip of a lifetime," Kitson expressed, having dedicated over 20 years of his career to the Department of the Army in Thailand, Laos and Vietnam. He humorously recalled flying aboard the CIA-owned airline, Air America, during the Vietnam War, and how unlike that time, his recent flight was devoid of any threats.

"The Honor Flight was one of the most poignant experiences of my life," Kitson affirmed.

Veterans embarked on visits to various memorials during their tour. They also stopped by landmarks dedicated to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the iconic Lincoln Memorial on the Capitol Mall.

"The Honor Flight is a gift from the people of Kern County," said Janis Mattoon Varner, a volunteer leader who shepherded the diverse group.



Navigating Patient Engagement: Introducing the My Wellness Passport Initiative



With the launch of the My Wellness Passport, Regal Medical Group, Lakeside Community Healthcare and ADOC are helping to bridge the gap between patients and their health milestones, providing members with a comprehensive toolkit to achieve their health goals.

Regal, Lakeside and ADOC are proud to introduce the My Wellness Passport initiative, an approach designed to empower new Medicare Advantage and dual members. The goal is to make health management more intuitive, integrated and incentivized by encouraging members to complete important preventive activities and receive “Regal Rewards.”

Anticipating a fourth quarter launch, the My Wellness Passport presents an



engaging way for members to map and track their health journey and make managing their health a less cumbersome process. Tailored to the modern patient’s needs, this booklet converges essential health information into one handy location, offering members a comprehensive view of their health milestones.

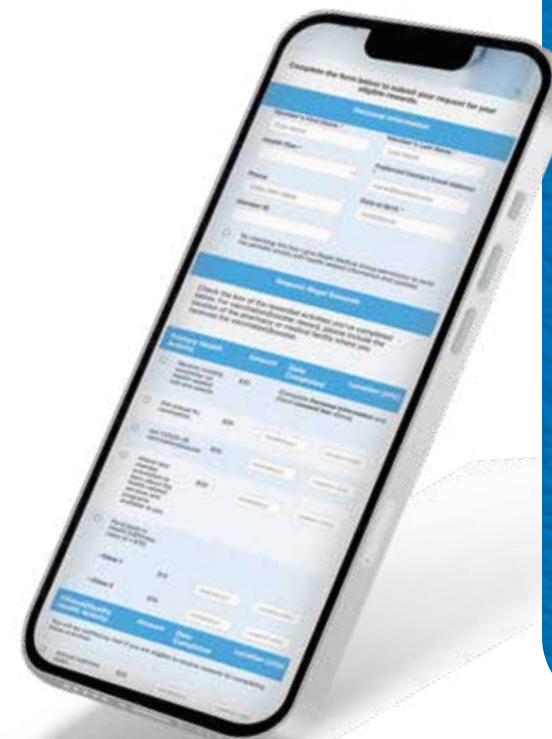
“The My Wellness Passport is an initiative that exemplifies our commitment to offering innovative solutions to our Medicare members. The extra guidance, engagement and incentives that are offered through the Wellness Passport will help on their journey to good health,” says Maarten Lobker, senior vice president of Marketing at Regal Medical Group.

The My Wellness Passport epitomizes this vision, consolidating clinical health

“The extra guidance, engagement and incentives that are offered through the Wellness Passport will benefit the health of our Medicare members.”

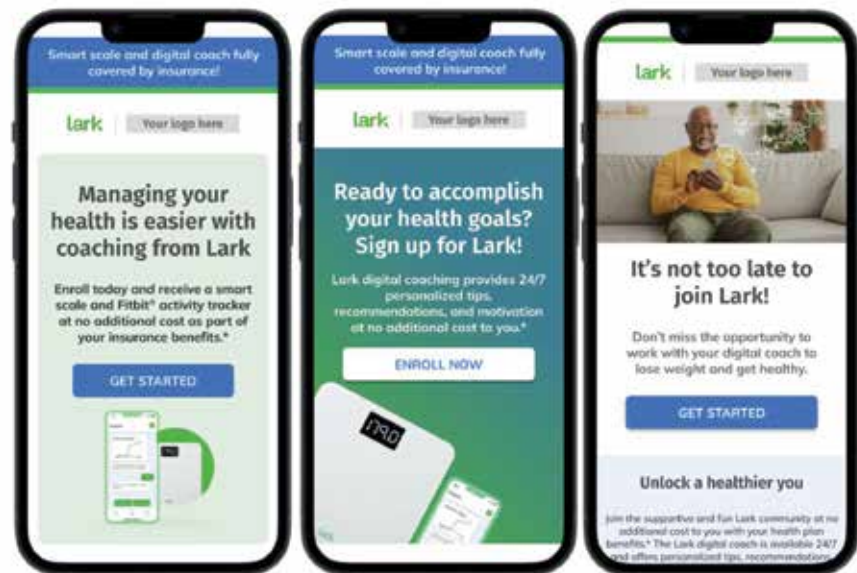
~ Maarten Lobker,
Senior Vice President of Marketing
at Regal Medical Group

activities and rewards in a structured and fun manner. With the launch of this program, Regal, Lakeside and ADOC are helping define a new era of patient engagement to drive health outcomes.



Features and Benefits of the My Wellness Passport

- Efficient Health and Care Management:** The Passport offers streamlined pages for patients to record critical details ranging from their physician contacts and medication regimen to upcoming appointments. This will reduce discrepancies and miscommunication, and more seamlessly guide members toward participating in preventive and responsible care choices.
- Incentivized Wellness Activities:** The Passport promotes certain essential health activities by offering Regal Rewards. Members can earn up to \$280 in e-gift (or physical) cards, usable at CVS, excluding purchases of cigarettes or alcohol. These rewards are provided for completion of activities such as annual flu shots, COVID-19 vaccines/boosters, participation in health education classes and attending new member orientation sessions. The program is housed in the Health Education department, and a third-party vendor will manage the distribution of gift cards to guarantee efficient and compliant delivery.
- Informative Monthly Newsletter:** Members can further their knowledge by subscribing to a monthly newsletter. Here, they’ll gain insights into timely health-related news, local events, and wellness tips — all while earning a Regal Reward for their subscription.
- Aligning With HCC and HEDIS Measures:** The My Wellness Passport isn’t just about rewards; it’s about reinforcing the values that drive STAR, HCC/HEDIS and other quality initiatives. The program has been designed to promote the appropriate utilization of healthcare services and influence behaviors that will positively impact health outcomes of Medicare Advantage and dual members.



Empowering Patients on Their Journey to Better Health

DOHC Supports At-Risk Populations Through AI-Based Coaching Programs

Building on the success of their recent Heart Health Program partnership with Lark Health, Desert Oasis Healthcare (DOHC) has now expanded that collaboration to offer 24/7 coaching using artificial intelligence (AI) to other patient populations dealing with chronic health conditions.

“We’re now offering a general Wellness Program to prevent chronic diseases and a Diabetes Prevention Program to prevent or delay progression of prediabetes to diabetes,” said Lindsey

Valenzuela, Pharm.D., and associate VP of Clinical Health Integration at DOHC. “We are delighted that we can offer more of Lark’s coaching programs to our eligible members at no cost.”

“We’re now offering a general Wellness Program to prevent chronic diseases and a Diabetes Prevention Program to prevent or delay progression of prediabetes to diabetes. We are delighted that we can offer more of Lark’s coaching programs to our eligible members at no cost.”

~ Lindsey Valenzuela, Pharm.D., and Associate VP of Clinical Health Integration at DOHC

Using “conversational AI,” connected devices, remote patient monitoring and elements of behavioral science techniques, Lark helps participants improve their health to manage and reduce their risk of chronic disease. The Lark programs offer coaching in behavioral health, weight management, tobacco cessation, reducing stress and anxiety, and other areas. With heart disease as the No. 1 killer of both men and women in the U.S. and the increasing prevalence of diabetes and other chronic diseases, DOHC seeks to prevent or lessen the impact of these diseases among its patients.

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For more than 30 years, Heritage Provider Network (HPN) has provided quality, cost-effective healthcare to the communities we serve. Today, HPN and its affiliates manage the healthcare of more than 1 million individuals. Our network has thousands of primary care physicians and specialists and hundreds of hospitals.

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Our Awards

Recognition of Commitment and Excellence

The recognition we have received demonstrates our practices in excellence. We're proud to be awarded for our commitment to our members and our community.



Wellness Excellence Award in Health Education — Southern California Foundation for Health Care



Top Ten Physician Medical Networks in California by America's Physician Groups



NCQA Certification for Utilization Management and Credentialing



Elite Status of Excellence for the Standards of Medical Care by America's Physician Groups



Recognized by the Integrated Healthcare Association for our diabetic registries