

Putting The Patient First

By Steve Case

Co-founder of AOL and CEO of Revolution, LLC

I'm often asked why I chose to enter the health care industry, and become an advocate for sweeping change, even though I have no real background in the field. The answer comes from personal experience. Even a family as fortunate as mine isn't immune from the problems that everyone else faces in dealing with the health care system. In its most extreme form, I saw caring doctors and nurses trapped in an inhumane bureaucracy when my brother, Dan, died from a brain tumor in 2002. And, on the more run-of-the-mill side of things, as a parent, I've been frustrated when a child has developed a fever or a twisted ankle on a weekend – and the only choices were waiting until Monday to see a doctor, or going to a hospital emergency room.

In these experiences, and others, I've seen a system that fails to put the patient first. I've seen waste we wouldn't tolerate in other industries. And I've seen doctors and nurses unable to spend time doing what they do best: taking care of patients, not filling out forms or dealing with paperwork. It doesn't have to be this way. At Revolution Health, I'm putting my money where my mouth is, so to speak, by investing in ideas fall into three categories: content, coverage, and care.

By “content,” I mean that every person should have access to the information and tools needed to help make the best health care decisions for your family. Right now, you can pick a restaurant on line – why shouldn't it be just as easy to find the right doctor on the Internet? Right now, your kids can research their homework online – shouldn't you have equally easy access to the latest fact-checked information about an ailment that you or a loved one has contracted? Right now, you can manage your financial records or bill paying online – shouldn't you be able to do the same for your personal health records and health care finances? Right now, you can easily connect online with folks who share your interest in needlepoint, or motorcycle riding, or baseball teams – shouldn't there also be a place to connect with those who share your health concerns, when you need support, information, or comfort? At Revolution Health, we're building an online portal that will meet these needs, and many others.

Health care coverage is another important need. We believe every American should have it: it should be easy to understand and affordable, as your family should only pay for the kind of coverage you need. We're already working to develop offerings that will advance these goals – but we can't stop there. We also believe that health plans should provide you with incentives to get healthy and stay healthy: exercise, diet, fitness, and preventive care. The very best way to combat the skyrocketing costs of health coverage isn't by slashing health care – but by reducing costs through wellness and prevention programs.

Finally, there should be new options for providing health care. Why should a parent, whose child has an ear infection, have to take time off work to get that child treatment?

Why can't we have clinics in convenient locations — retail stores, pharmacies or grocery stores — open at convenient times? At Revolution Health, we are investing in RediClinics — one of several companies that are creating nurse-practitioner staffed medical clinics inside retail stores. These clinics are inexpensive (about \$39 per visit), open at nights and on weekends, and involve virtually no waiting. They are convenient and affordable — and they free up doctors' offices from routine cases that can be handled elsewhere.

For the critics who say we can't afford health care for all our people, I say we can't afford *not* to make the system work for everyone. Innovative private sector companies have an important part to play, but so do policy-makers and concerned citizens. And these issues do not need to fall along partisan lines: at Revolution Health, I'm pleased to be joined by prominent Republicans, including Colin Powell, and prominent Democrats, including Seattle's own Frank Raines. (www.revolution.com)

By getting patients better and more timely information, by focusing on prevention and wellness, and by engaging and investing as communities, we can have better care, at lower cost, provided more conveniently, for everyone.

Steve Case, was the co-founder AOL and its Chairman and CEO for almost 20 years. Earlier this year, he founded Revolution Health Group, a private company seeking to give patients more convenience, choice, and control in health care.