

Dr. Jay W. Lee Interview on Health Equity and the Importance of Preventive Care

How do you define health equity and what role do family physicians play in promoting it?

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So Health Equity is the concept that everyone deserves to be met where they're at and to, you know, be able to optimize their health with available resources.

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And part of my job as a family physician is ensuring that my patients get everything that they deserve.

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So that can be anything from preventive care to vaccines to ensuring that they're safe in their neighborhood, and also, of course, all the medical stuff.

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So things like caring for their chronic disease, caring for them when they're sick.

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And you know, one of the big things that we want to do is prevent people from going to the ER or the hospital if they can avoid it and allow folks to kind of live their best life and not have to be overly burdened by health. 1:03

How do social drivers of health impact patients' ability to access health care, and how can family physicians help address these factors?

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So this issue of social drivers of health is really important to me. I work in a federally qualified Health Center.

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Typically these are patients who come from zip codes where there are challenges with regards to things like food security or housing or transportation or safety.

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And so one of the big things that my team does is do some initial screening when we bring patients into the office to assess where they may be in terms of their ability to kind of live their best lives.

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And when, when we identify potential concerns, say, for example, food insecurity, then it gives me a sense of where do I need to connect the patient to how can I adjust treatment plans so that they're best able to meet the goals that we've set forward and that we've agreed to.

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And then ultimately that it be really a, a, a very important consideration as we're thinking about medical treatment, that, you know, that those two things kind of interact with each other that the medical treatment side and then what's going on in the patient's environment is super important. 2:21

Why is preventive care crucial to overall health and how do social factors affect patients' ability to get preventive services?

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You know, preventive care is the key to ensuring that you live as long as possible and as well as possible during the length of your life.

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And what that basically means is that we're looking at several domains of your health.

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So one is cancer screening.

I think we're all very aware of that.

Things like mammograms and colonoscopies, these are all things that are very important from our perspective.

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And I definitely, when you know, when patients come in and they're of a certain age, I have that conversation with them.

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The other is around immunizations.

There's preventive, you know, ways, there's ways to prevent illnesses through the wonders of science and through the wonders of vaccines.

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And so things like measles and tetanus and pertussis and certain deadly types of pneumonia, as well as COVID are all things that we worry about and that we know the science shows there's an opportunity for us to prevent, you know, a patient from getting those things.

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And then lastly, it's around diseases.

So screening for things that may be in someone's family history or is common in the population.

So we all know that there's lots of diabetes, lots of hypertension or high blood pressure.

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And these are things that we're routinely checking as well as cholesterol to ensure that patients aren't set up setting themselves up for heart disease, say five, 10-15 years down the line. 4:01

How does having a usual source of care like a family physician improve health equity and health outcomes?

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The tenants of primary care and family medicine are, can be viewed in the standpoint of what I would call the four C's, and this is borrowed from Barbara Starfield's literature.

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And the four C's are, it's first contact care, it's care that's continuous, it's care that's comprehensive, and it's care that's well coordinated.

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I would argue that everyone wants all of those four C's, right?

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Like when you need something, you know who to call, that person's going to be there for you.

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You want to have that same person who knows your history, who you've built a relationship with that that sort of gets you to be there at those hard times.

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You want that person to not just refer you out to every sub specialist under the sun.

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You want them to be smart and wise and knowledgeable about your likes and wants.

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And then kind of coach you to ensure that you're getting everything that you need and deserve from the healthcare system.

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So, you know, I think those are the reasons why having a continuous source of care or usual source of care is super important.

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And you know, I think in this in today's day and age, it's really easy to have these one-off transactions where you need something.

But if you don't have somebody there for you, go find one.

It'll make a huge difference in your life. 5:35