

# It Doesn't Have to Be This Way

**J**UST BEFORE THE PREVIOUS issue of *National Underwriter* went to press, my father was admitted to the hospital for what turned out to be severe diabetes. By the time he stabilized, his blood sugar was one Mars bar away from a diabetic coma. This was not Dad's first brush with mortality, though. He has had, over the course of his life, two near-fatal heart attacks, lung cancer, a pacemaker, skin cancer, prostate cancer,

ingness to change his own habits, despite a pretty compelling body of evidence that those habits were doing him no favors, boggled my mind. Almost as much as a hospital that serves buttered roast beef sandwiches on white bread to diabetes patients. Or that sends around, as it did with my father, an obese heart doctor with nicotine stains on his fingers.

I left the hospital shaking my head. Our health care system delivers acute care

but not patient wellness or even preventative health. Nowhere was that more evident than in the hospital parking lot, where incoming visitors looked as bad as the patients themselves. What hope do we have when medical care providers themselves don't seem

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to be taking their own health seriously?

No wonder why our health care costs are so out of control. What I can't figure out is why the health insurance industry plays along. Where are the industry's public awareness campaigns to promote good health and reduce future claims? Certainly not on the TV channels hawking pharmaceutical ads. That being the case, why should we expect the cost of health care to go down or for patients to use less health care? And when things reach a breaking point, as they have, why should we expect our legislators to *not* take drastic action? Hell if I know. But yet, we do.

It didn't have to be this way. The dire situation faced by insurers trying to figure out how to make the best of health care reform seems a lot like my dad's health. The warning signs were out there, but went unheeded until everything turned upside down. The question now is, how does the industry get them right-side up again?

bladder cancer and now this. It comes as he's fighting a MRSA infection compounded with pneumonia and congestive heart failure he developed in the hospital. This guy racks up serious medical ailments like my son collects Star Wars figures.

On the day I visited him, I watched him order a lunch that consisted of a roast beef sandwich on white bread, with butter and a Diet Coke. I suggested that maybe, given that his blood has the viscosity of maple syrup, he forget about drinking any kind of soda, period. Unsweetened iced tea, maybe? He brushed me off. What he ordered was permissible according to his hospital-managed carb plan, and besides, he has been eating this way all his life. He wasn't about to change. "Don't even get me started on veganism," he said, digging at the fact that I am a vegan, which I think my Dad considers as being somewhere between being a Communist and being a Hare Krishna.

The irony of this is that just before I visited my dad, I received the results of my annual blood work, which led my physician to proclaim my health as "A+." That was awesome. But seeing my dad's unwill-

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