

Good morning. I am Howard Cloth, a resident of the Town of Lexington. I've been a patient at Family Practice Group in Arlington since 2008 where I have been fortunate to experience and benefit from a few of the "transformers" featured in the **'Primary Care for You' Legislation (S750)**:

- Group visits for health and wellness (for more than 8 years);
- Patient advisory member of the practice's QI team (for 5 years);
- Health & Wellness coaching (5 years and counting);

About 13 years ago, I began a wellness journey that changed my life and perhaps saved it.

My story begins with my annual check-up in May 2010, shortly after I retired. The results were not good: I was pre-diabetic; my BMI was in the "obese" range; I was becoming a "couch-potato" and I had issues relating to my blood pressure and cholesterol.

I was urged to consider joining a 4-month group wellness program for weight management and lifestyle changes to reduce risk factors that was being conducting at Family Practice Group. I was willing but skeptical and with good reason – I'd struggled with my weight over the most of my adulthood and nothing I'd tried before ever worked (or worked for very long).

The program began in September and the results were beyond expectations, so I re-upped for a 2nd group in January 2011. Over the 10-month span – September thru June – I lost 30 lbs. and 8 inches in my waist. Even better, I've been able to maintain and improve upon those successes over the next 12 years (and counting)... by refining my behavioral changes with the assistance of and continued participation in the wellness groups. I'm also healthier and in better shape by far than in decades, if not 'ever':

- I Nordic-walk about 18 miles per week at a 4mph pace;

- I do strength/resistance exercises at the gym;
- I sleep well;
- my mood is generally 'positive' in the sense of being content with my life;
- My food regimen emphasizes fish, fruits, veggies, legumes and other nutritionally "dense" foods;
- Since 2012, my annual test results have been 'normal' or 'optimal'
- Beginning in 2014, I've been off all meds (except low-dose aspirin and a statin – I had a stent implanted in 2016).
- Oh yeah, I'll be 82 next month!

So, how do transformative behavioral changes like that happen?

- **There's the program** – 15 weekly sessions over 4 months – seems just right in terms of intensity, repetition and duration;
- **The material** – Sensibly designed and introduced to participants gradually so that it builds on itself over time.
- **Measurement** – Weigh-ins and blood pressure readings are taken weekly and weekly behavioral questionnaires are completed by participants both to help track our progress and to acclimate us to the benefits of "accountability by measurement".
- **Enhancements** –The program includes weekly experiential challenges (e.g., the 'No Added Sugar for a Week'), proper basic exercise techniques, mindfulness, nutrition guideline "deciphering" and food shopping expeditions.

AND, there's 2 additional factors:

1. **The 1st is "individual"**:

- a. You've heard the one about 'how many therapists does it take to change a light bulb'? The answer: just 1, but the light bulb really needs to want to change!
- b. So, ***if*** the question is: "Can you teach an 'old dog' like me some new health, fitness and nutrition "tricks" that could transform my life?" Then the conclusion is: "Yes, ***if*** – like the light bulb – I really want to change!"

2. **The 2nd is “collective”**: That’s what really sets this wellness program apart – it’s a group program. It’s the emotional connection, bond and, yes affection that helps develop a “community” among group members as we travel the path together toward the common goal.

- a. And if you drill down a bit, you’ll find that what’s really at work is the magic of the back-and-forth dialogue and feedback, both in-person as well as on the e-list set up for each group. Both foster the **“secret sauce” of ‘accountability and support’** and allow the sharing our insights, the venting our frustrations, the asking for help and, yes, “crowing” about our successes.
 - i. When one of us experiences a ‘win’, it gives the rest of us hope;
 - ii. when someone confesses difficulty achieving a goal, many of us discover we weren’t the only one;
 - iii. when someone is simply “down” on their progress, there’s a chorus of support to underscore any overlooked headway and dispel any unreasonable self-criticism.

- b. Sound overly simplistic? It does, yet its value is supported by the data assembled by FPG for these groups that now number in the hundreds.

Roadblocks? Sure. My sense is that the greatest obstacle is “impatience” because we have come to expect ‘instant everything’. You need to give the changes you will make, some time to show results. ‘Support and accountability’ really help with this.

It’s also like learning a new language: some will “get it” faster than others but, as the behavioral changes are “for life”, you have all the time you need. After all, it took me until I was 69 to finally “get it”!

THE NEXT “TRANSFORMER” I EXPERIENCED WAS BEING A PATIENT ADVISOR.

My participation in the group wellness programs allowed me to get to know most all the doctors, PAs, MAs and administrative personnel to a greater depth and breadth than any other medical practice with which I have been a patient... and they with

me. So, I wasn't totally shocked when I was approached about becoming a 'patient advisory member' of their Quality Improvement Team.

WHAT DID I GET?

A transformative experience: It's like seeing the entire "iceberg" vs just what is visible above the water (which was how it was at the primary care practices that served me in the past).

- I was exposed to the high level of competence that the practice functions at all levels of staffing – all the dimensions for both provider and administrative – and how well they all interact to deliver superior, pro-active and empathetic patient care;
- It was an opportunity for me to contribute and "pay it forward" by participating in and supporting the practice's 'change' process -- shaping ***what*** it does and ***how*** it gets executed;
- All of that has enabled me to be a better patient in the sense of collaborating with my providers in my care management.

WHAT DOES THE PRACTICE GET?

Something way more significant and encompassing – an opportunity for a paradigm shift that benefits the ENTIRE practice and ALL of its patients:

- The benefit of a *patient's perspective and insight coupled with a venue to express and discuss it* (e.g., that issue a few Pre-Covid years ago about whether FPG accepts families that refuse to vaccinate);
- Experiencing its patients *as part of the solution* vs merely an "unwell" population that needs fixing;
- Thru exposure to patients as collaborators, an opportunity to *enhance the quality of the "work experience"* for both professionals and staff – also, possibly an antidote to 'burnout';

HOW HAS THE PRACTICE CHANGED?

- Expanded in terms of functionality: some examples
 - 'practice teams': made a difference for me in terms of flexibility as I learned to trust receiving care from the PA's and not insisting on a Dr.
 - Medical Scribes: a brilliant fix to the off-putting experience of being in a clinical setting while the provider focuses entirely on the computer and never makes "eye contact" [BTW, another "Transformer"]
 - 5-minute 'drop-in' Clinic: a great vehicle for dealing with minor issues
 - Extension of the 'wellness group' concept: to families, couples and youth
- Willingness to be pro-actively introspective, self-evaluative

Hard to imagine any primary care practice effectively serving their patients without a QI team that includes patient advisors – a sentiment I know my Patient Advisor colleague Wendy shares.

LASTLY, MY EXPERIENCE AS A HEALTH COACH.

In 2018, I was invited to become a team leader for the Wellness Campaign's mission to help grow the culture of wellness in Woburn and the surrounding communities.

The [Wellness Campaign](#) is a non-profit that is the "vessel" for the wellness intellectual property and concept shared with thousands over the years at FPG. It functions by supporting those of us who struggle with our health and weight-related chronic disease to transform our health and live a healthier life, one habit at a time.

- The Wellness Campaign group wellness program is an outgrowth of the one that I had been a participant for 8 years as a group member.
- Its offered at 'no cost' to participants thanks to a grant from the Cummings Foundation...*and neither am I paid* in the traditional sense – my compensation is I get the 'Support & Accountability' I need from 'sitting on the other side of the table', as it were, from the participants.

- Then there's the profound experience when my participants 'get it'...when I know I've gotten thru...that I've made a difference...So it's another opportunity to "pay it forward".

Initially conducted "in-person" in small-group sessions, it morphed to virtual Zoom sessions during COVID, where, for me, it remains because:

- The obstacle for participants of traveling to a session is removed;
- Sessions are recorded for access to members who missed a session;
- Members can access the sessions 'wherever they are': 2 years ago, one member joined us while on vacation in Cancun; this year I had the pleasure yet humbling experience of having one of my daughters who lives in Vancouver BC as a member (be still my heart!!).

You may be asking yourself: "what qualifies Howard to coach groups like this??"

- I have done the program, experienced lasting success, been trained to lead it. Also, consider the motivational impact my 13-year success story has on participants.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my views today. I hope it helps you conclude that enacting S750 is vital – a plan whose time has come.

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