

Thinking Like a Health Care Entrepreneur

Originally Published in *Mississippi Business Journal*

Innovation is a core skill of great entrepreneurs. To innovate is to look at the status quo and find a better way. The innovation might be a new or improved product or service, or it could be a new market or method of production. Successful entrepreneurs see an opportunity to create value in marketplace through innovation and execute on it. It is easy to complain about the problems in business; however, innovators take action. They are creative and think through how to navigate through the challenges and find opportunities.

In this column, I have suggested in prior articles that I believe that one of Mississippi's greatest assets and opportunities is its health care industry. In the complex world of health care today, it is easy to just want to "throw in the towel." Medical providers face cutbacks and regulatory uncertainty. Again, in these challenges lies the heart of opportunity. Dr. Robert L. Harris is a specialist physician practicing in Jackson as well as creative entrepreneur whose innovations continue to have a positive impact on women's health both in Mississippi and around the country.

Dr. Harris grew up on a dairy farm in Lee County and after graduating from Mississippi State University, he completed medical school at the University of Mississippi and a residency in OB/GYN at the University of Mississippi Medical Center. He continued his training by completing a fellowship in Urogynecology and Reconstructive Pelvic Surgery at Duke University Medical Center. Harris noted that, "My experience at Duke was one of the best things that ever happened to me professionally." Harris turned down an offer to join Duke's faculty and returned to Mississippi to practice medicine as a faculty member at UMMC. In 1999, Dr. Harris along with Drs. John Isaacs, Jimmy Moore, and Steven Speights formed Women's Specialty Center (WSC) to provide sub-specialty GYN care.

Dr. Harris is driven to find a better way to do things. In 2000, after opening his new medical practice, he read the *The E-Myth* by Michael Gerber. This book influenced his thinking about how to operate his practice. He knew that he would have to work smarter, not just harder if he wanted a better quality of life. Dr. Harris became a student of leadership and personal effectiveness and made a fairly radical decision to cut back his patient care from five days a week to four. This allowed him time to actually think about better ways to operate his practice as well as consider entrepreneurial pursuits. He credits his practice partner, Dr. Steven Speights, for allowing him this opportunity. "Steven and I and our nurses and nurse practitioners work together as a true team. Steven and I split things equally and leverage our talents. He does more clinical work and allows me to do what I do best so that we both benefit." In his practice, Dr. Harris has found ways to streamline and create better efficiencies. For example, Dr. Harris and Dr. Speights always assist each other in surgery, which they have found to be a more efficient and less stressful. Dr. Harris and the physicians at WSC were early adopters of electronic medical records, and they have effectively utilized this technology to better care for their patients.

One idea that Dr. Harris developed was to create Bladder Health Network (BHN), a company to provide complex incontinence evaluation services to busy OB/GYN practices. Harris formed BHN in 2004, and the company has grown to become a leader in providing pelvic health service solutions for OB/GYN and Urology practices across the country. BHN has offices in Jackson, Charlotte, NC, and

Austin, TX the company and has formed a strategic alliance with Boston Scientific to market the services of BHN nationwide. As the company grew, Harris has turned over the management of the company to John Spivey and a dedicated leadership team. Harris noted, "I am excited about what BHN is doing to help expand the awareness and treatment of incontinence and pelvic floor problems which impacts millions of women."

Today, Harris continues his busy medical practice, and he is a recognized thought leader in urogynecology and urodynamics. In visiting with Dr. Harris, I noted his desire to "pay it forward" and to encourage other physicians and business people in their journey. Harris shared, "I enjoy helping young physicians as they are preparing for their future. I had great mentors as I was coming along, and I know how much they impacted my trajectory in life."

I am encouraged by Dr. Harris and physicians like him who have chosen to utilize their advanced training to help the people of Mississippi. They are becoming the nucleus of bringing world-class care to our state. I am also encouraged by Dr. Harris' willingness to take the difficult step to break from the tyranny of the urgent that exists in most busy professional practices and to act on his idea to start BHN to help provide cutting-edge medical care by leveraging technology. This type of innovative thinking and action is the kind we need to move Mississippi forward.

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