NEUROLEADERSHIP · DEEP CONNECTION · BLIND SPOTS · FAILURE & SUCCESS · IMPROVING ENGAGEMENT

choice

the magazine of professional coaching

Reproduced with the permission of choice Magazine, www.choice-online.com

Reproduced with the permission of choice Magazine, www.choice-online.com

Coaching Healthcare Leaders

Navigating the chaos to bring out the best in its people

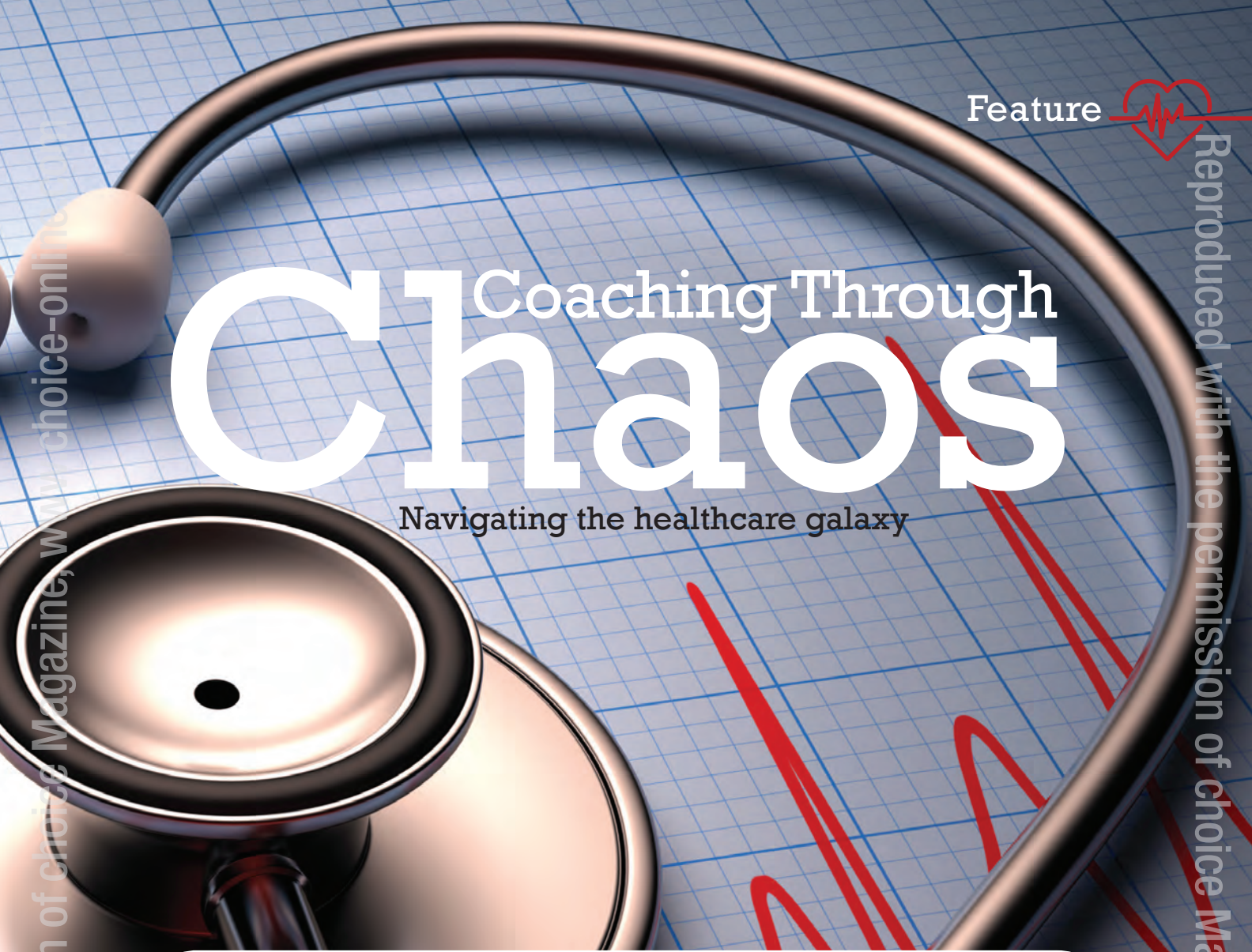
Coaching the Care Givers | How Providers Become Leaders | Physician, Heal Thyself

VOLUME 14 • NUMBER 2 I WWW.CHOICE-ONLINE.COM

How can coaching contribute to creating clarity, continuous improvement and efficacy in the complicated world of healthcare ... for practitioners, patients and managers? What is unique or different about coaching healthcare professionals/leaders compared to other leaders/clients? How can and does coaching complement other therapies? Read on to explore the coaching opportunities and challenges in healthcare around the world.

Reproduced with the permission of choice Magazine, www.choice-online.com

Reproduced with the permission of choice Magazine, www.choice-online.com



Coaching Through Chaos

Navigating the healthcare galaxy

By Darelyn "DJ" Mitsch, MCC & Mark Greenawald, MD

"Everything should be as simple as possible, but not simpler." ~ Einstein

It is oft said that humanity is at a crossroads. The fact is, humanity has always existed at a crossroads, with human systems existing in a continual dynamic-state tension between simplicity, complexity and chaos, with the greatest potential for creativity and growth existing at the far edge of complexity near the edge of chaos.

In such understanding, chaos becomes the space of apparent utter confusion or disorder. It is at this edge where higher states of consciousness are necessary for "sense-making" and pattern recognition; where the concept of order is constantly reframed and reestablished. Our hunger for order, certainty and easy solutions –liberation from problems and challenges – is often attached to how we

Reproduced with the permission of choice Magazine, www.choice-online.com

Reproduced with the permission of choice Magazine, www.choice-online.com

Reproduced with the permission of choice Magazine, www.choice-online.com

believe 'things should work' in the universe. The same can be said for the 'system' of healthcare, which is often said to be in a state of 'crisis.' Interestingly, in Chinese, the two symbols that make up the word "crisis" are translated to the English words "danger" and "opportunity," aptly describing the zone between complexity and crisis (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Complexity in Healthcare

In its present state, healthcare could not be considered a system designed to support health in ways that include preplanned order, integration or unity as essential ingredients. The commoditization of the current process has transformed the central healing relationship of patient and physician into a transaction of 'consumers,' 'providers,' and multiple other parties competing for greater influence

This should come as no surprise when, according to the World Bank, healthcare accounts for approximately 10 percent of gross domestic product expenditures in most industrialized countries, and an astounding 17 percent in the U.S. There are tragic consequences: more than 50 percent of the physician workforce in the U.S. is in a state of burnout, waste is rampant, quality is highly variable, safety is a constant question, and answers as to the 'right way' continue to be elusive.

Figure 2

The healthcare system is like a galaxy with many planets

Defining the Healthcare Leade

As shown in Figure 2, leaders within the various "P's" of the healthcare galaxy often have vastly different needs, accountabilities and business imperatives, as well as varying understanding of responsibilities and obligations to we 'patients.' For instance, just consider the dynamic tension that exists between payers, purchasers, politicians, policy makers, profiteers pioneers and providers when it comes to defining what is 'best' for a patient. Despite the many points of entry for any examination of this complex system, the common focus is the need for those who lead (and those who support them) to take us to a new and desired state – one of 'ordered complexity' and of a way forward.

Let's consider one dimension of the planet – those who lead within systems that provide direct clinical care – to better understand this complexity. Practicing physicians who also serve in leadership roles often live in oppositional tension caused by these distinct roles. Very few have been developed to lead and manage others. Few have meeting facilitation skills or can serve as political activists to lobby for saner solutions.

> "As the system takes on a more chaotic quality, many leaders and healers in the space of healthcare overstretch their capacity for coping and adaptation, falling into a sense of futility, isolation, cynicism, and emotional blunting."

As the system takes on a more chaotic quality, many leaders and healers in the space of healthcare overstretch their capacity for coping and adaptation, falling into a sense of futility, isolation, cynicism, and emotional blunting, regularly asking: "Is this worth it?"

Such a question is where coaches find our point of entry and gain traction. It's between the edge of complexity and the creative edge that coaching provides the needed context to promote reflection and reframing, guiding these leaders back.

Coaching as the Guidance System

Coaching – with its emphasis on exploration, emergence, novelty, patterns and networks – is the perfect 'technology' for healthcare leaders to navigate these complex adaptive

Reproduced with the permission of choice Magazine, www.choice-online.com

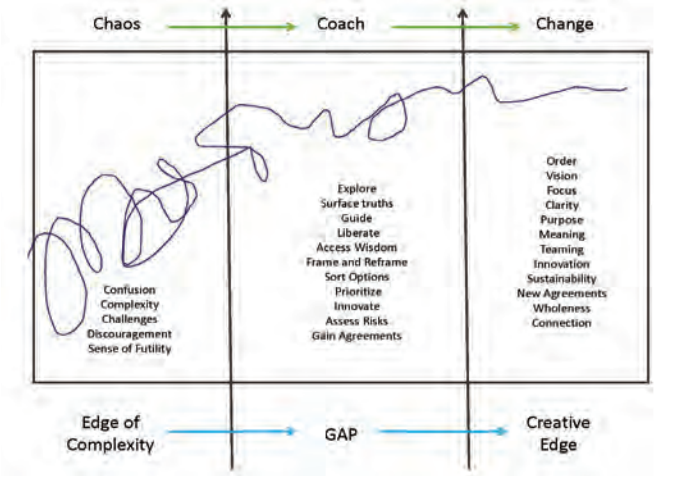
systems. Coaching calls on 'curiosity,' which is the most imperative shift for those who are expected to have knowledge or answers. One of the most challenging blocks to simplicity is the reluctance of leaders in healthcare to seek new solutions outside their own (often maladaptive) system.

The coach's role is to reframe the matrix so it is easier to comprehend and establish a gap between the challenges and desired state. The Figure 3 diagram illustrates three components and how coaching provides a pathway back to the competitive and creative edge for leading through change.

Simplifying, meaning-making, context, novelty, emergence, reframing, exploration, discovery, interconnectivity, intuition, pattern recognition, improvisation, possibility thinking – these are what coaching brings to this creative edge between complexity and chaos and what healthcare leaders desperately need. This is the key for engaging leaders in healthcare. By coaching for self-awareness, communication skills and the development of themselves and their teams, the space for a sense of order will emerge. It is a pattern and can be replicated.

Figure 3

Coaching from chaos and complexity to change and creativity



With this new awareness, direction toward and emergence of answers to the questions, 'what is health?' and 'how are we contributing to wholeness and to sustaining man's life on this mother ship planet?' will appear – one person, one relationship, one sub-culture, one organization at a time. With the support of coaching, leaders will be more comfortable in the dynamic tension of 'both/and' at the creative edge of complexity/chaos. They can accept it – even welcome and embrace it – as the place of answers rather than an enemy to be battled, fled from or avoided

Back to The Edge

Moving into, or seeing through, any challenge is often easier when deconstructing it. By seeing the bigger picture and coaching the leaders of each of the planets in the healthcare galaxy, there can be a convergent path to wholeness.

There are some health systems that have identified coaching as a culture imperative and launched internal coaching initiatives or coach cadres to support clinicians and administrators. Yet, there are still too few in the larger galaxy. Those who lead complex, often chaotic healthcare systems need to know that coaching is the antidote for navigating change, and that working with a coach can help make sense of the seemingly senseless.

When we teamed to write this article we did so with the hopes that this edition of *choice* might provide the starting point for coaches to really focus on the impact we can have now. So we are posing this question for professional coaches (or those who desire to coach in this space) to explore:

> "One of the most challenging blocks to simplicity is the reluctance of leaders in healthcare to seek new solutions outside their own, often maladaptive, system."

"How can coaching advance the noble and worthy cause of health-caring and catalyze sense-making in the healthcare system?"

To all masterful coaches we propose a challenge: offer your best coaching for one leader, clinician or administrator in the business of healthcare this year. These are highly educated, savvy – and for the most part, very willing – students of life who are now standing at a precipice on the edge of creativity. Changing the system may be as simple as coaching a handful of powerful, influential healthcare leaders to become change agents for all others.

Human systems are complex. Health, well-being and happiness are central to the focus of coaching and why it has become a calling for many of us at this phase of our evolution. Healthcare as an industry needs us, and the discipline of coaching, to rehumanize this dynamic and evolving system … to bring these professionals back to life more fully in their most symbolic work.

Reproduced with the permission of choice Magazine, www.choice-online.com
Reproduced with the permission of choice Magazine, www.choice-online.com