



PERCHED on the Cutting Edge of Health Care

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Bob Crane

In a career spanning more than 35 years, **Bob Crane, Sloan '71** has influenced nearly every aspect of the health-care system—from insurance design and care delivery, to hospital construction and medical research.

Before his retirement in March, a typical day for Crane may have gone something like this: attend a morning meeting about a new research program involving genes, environment, and health; have lunch with colleagues to discuss a consulting opportunity with a health system in Saudi Arabia; in the afternoon, attend a leadership team meeting to discuss the finances of America’s largest managed-care organization; and, finally, a review of progress on the construction of five new California hospitals.

“At the end of my career, I wore five different hats, so my day-to-day activity involved juggling a lot of different responsibilities,” says Crane, an executive at Kaiser Foundation Health Plan, Inc.

Most recently, Crane served as the senior vice president of research and policy development for Kaiser Foundation Health Plan, Inc. and Kaiser Foundation Hospitals. He also was the director of the Kaiser Permanente Institute for Health Policy and president of Kaiser Permanente International, which is focused on sharing the organization’s experience with others around the globe. He is also a member of the organization’s National Leadership Team.

Crane’s wide array of responsibilities led him to rack up more than 1.8 million miles of air travel during his career at Kaiser. This spring, he decided to cut back. Since March, he has entered semi-retirement. He remains a senior advisor to Kaiser

Permanente with a focus on the Institute for Health Policy and international consulting. He will also continue to chair the board of Archimedes Inc., a start-up company that Kaiser Permanente spun off with the goal of improving health-care quality and efficiency through mathematics and modeling.

A Surprising Focus on Policy

When Crane entered the Sloan Program in Health Administration in 1969, he had no idea his career would span so many aspects of the health-care system.

“When I began, I had the goal of being a hospital administrator,” he says. “But the program had a very strong focus on health policy, and that led me in a different direction altogether.

“Being exposed to policy issues led me to get experience working in government, which was hugely broadening and ultimately instrumental in the rest of my career,” Crane says. “It was foundational—there’s no question about it.”

After finishing the Sloan program, Crane headed to Washington for a series of jobs focusing on health policy.

“I decided to get federal experience because I knew the federal government would play a huge role in anything else I did in health care,” he says. “That ended up being instrumental.”

Crane began working in the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, and then moved to a professional staff position on the U.S. House of Representatives’ Subcommittee on Health and the Environment, where he played a pivotal role in the oversight and amendment of the HMO Act of 1973. That act paved the way for a revolutionary change in the health-care system.

After eight years in Washington, Crane left to work at the New York

State Department of Health, eventually becoming its director of health systems management—a job that included everything from licensing HMOs to helping decide where additional hospital beds were needed.

He credits this early government experience with his later success at Kaiser.

“I’ve been fortunate to have sat in a lot of places where I could view the industry as a whole,” he says. “Both of those experiences set me up to be of important value to Kaiser. Having a broad perspective of the industry is really instrumental in making the kind of decisions I made.”

Clear Priorities Ahead

With his broad responsibilities, Crane is intimately familiar with many of the challenges facing the health-care industry today—from prevention and wellness, to pushing the boundaries of new research, and deciding the best models for caring for patients.

But by far, the most pressing challenge in the United States is the growing ranks of the uninsured, he says. According to the most recent census data, more than 47 million people do not have health insurance.

“That is just not acceptable,” Crane says. “It is the issue of the day. It will play a central role in the presidential campaign, and it will be something the next administration and the Congress need to address.”

In his work consulting with foreign health-care systems and governments, Crane has seen a myriad of ways other countries have solved this problem. Now it’s time for the U.S. government to come up with its own method, he says. That will most likely change the way health care is delivered in the United States.

One model was adopted by Massachusetts. In 2006, the state passed a law requiring all of its residents to carry health insurance. The law also provides nearly free health care for residents earning less than the federal poverty line, and subsidized access to health care for those earning up to three times the poverty threshold. As of the end of 2007, it was credited with covering an additional 300,000 people.

It’s a model that could work in other areas of the country as well, and this has been his major focus in California, Crane says. Coverage for the uninsured is something he will continue working on in his semi-retirement—along with spending more time with his wife, Susan, and their exotic parrots, improving his tennis game, learning to speak Spanish, and getting more involved in his local community.

Looking back on his career, Crane says he feels proud and also a little surprised at how it turned out.

“I have been very fortunate that I’ve had the opportunities I’ve had—some of them I created and some of them have just come my way,” he says. “It’s fair to say that my career has exceeded my expectations in every way. And my Cornell education was really the grounding for that.”



Bob Crane with wife, Susan, and daughter, Alexis.



Bob and Susan hold the family's two eclectus parrots from the south Pacific, Java and Scarlet.

