

Confronting adversity: global health leaders share strategies for today's challenges

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In a world still grappling with the aftermath of a global pandemic and the growing burden of complex health needs, the WHLNet broadcast “*Confronting Adversity: Health Leaders Taking on Today's Challenges*” brought together healthcare leaders and policymakers from 21 countries across the globe for a vital conversation on resilience, strategy, and hope.

Moderated by Peter Lachman, the session featured four distinguished panellists— **Gaurav Loria (India), Lydia Okotoyi (Kenya), Mathieu Louiset (Belgium), and Juan Limo (Peru)** —who shared frontline insights from their health systems and the leadership strategies they believe are critical for confronting adversity.

Leading through diversity and complexity: lessons from India

Gaurav Loria, Group Head Operations and Patient Experience - Hospitals Division and Chief Quality Officer at Apollo Hospitals in India, described leading in a system marked by enormous scale, diversity, and disparity. In India, leadership demands an intricate balance between systems-level coordination and community-level customization.

Gaurav highlighted the crucial role of values-based leadership, especially during times of uncertainty. Leaders, he said, must not only manage operational challenges like workforce shortages or infrastructure gaps, but also address competing values that create cultural resistance and misinformation that impede progress.

He championed innovation, including the use of digital platforms and data transparency to improve decision-making. However, he warned against technology being viewed as a silver bullet, emphasising the importance of a patient-centric approach to address challenges.

Gaurav encouraged healthcare leaders to consider how they can contribute to creating [resilient healthcare systems](#).

Navigating crisis and collaboration: the Kenyan experience

Lydia Okotoyi, Director of Health Care Quality at Kenyatta National Hospital, Nairobi, Kenya, illuminated the complex landscape of healthcare leadership in a low-middle income country. Her insights revealed the multifaceted challenges facing healthcare leaders today including navigating healthcare reforms, such as changes in social health insurance, and addressing workforce uncertainties.

Key challenges include significant nurse migration, with many specialized nurses leaving annually, and substantial infrastructure pressures due to age and cost. Moreover, recent healthcare budget cuts demand innovative leadership approaches.

Lydia emphasized the critical need for leaders to be adaptable, data-informed, and committed to supporting their current workforce and investing in staff early in their career. Her vision of leadership transcends traditional management, focusing on creating value, motivating staff

beyond financial compensation, and addressing emerging issues like climate change's impact on healthcare.

The future of healthcare leadership lies in resilience, compassion, and strategic thinking.

Restoring humanity in healthcare: reflections from Belgium

Mathieu Louiset, Head of Improvement Services and deputy CEO at PAQS (Plateforme pour l'Amélioration de la Qualité des Services de santé), in Belgium, highlighted the critical need to rehumanize healthcare. He argued that leaders must move beyond financial metrics and staff shortages to restore meaning and compassion in healthcare delivery.

Mathieu's core message centered on three pivotal concepts: asking "What matters to you?", practicing kindness in healthcare, and embracing compassionate leadership. He emphasized that healthcare is fundamentally about care, not just cure, and that staff engagement directly impacts patient outcomes.

Drawing on research, Mathieu noted that every year, thousands of preventable adverse events occur, suggesting that the root cause lies not in technical systems, but in quality culture and leadership. He challenged healthcare leaders to prioritize human factors, reinvest in workplace joy, and recognize that true leadership is about connection, not control.

The path forward, he argues, is through kindness, asking meaningful questions, and putting humanity back at the center of care.

Leadership in crisis: navigating healthcare's complex challenges

In a compelling exploration of healthcare leadership, Juan Limo, leader of the Quality and Safety National Committee at Peruvian Medical College, highlighted the critical need for adaptive and transformational leadership in confronting complex healthcare challenges. Drawing on insights from emerging disease outbreaks and pandemic experiences, he emphasized the importance of seeing the bigger picture through a systems approach.

Juan argued that modern healthcare leaders must be prepared for unprecedented challenges, from technological disruptions to public health crises. He stressed the need for agile measures, robust governance, and effective communication to mobilize teams during adversity.

Key to his presentation was the concept of "adaptive leadership" - the ability to mobilize people to tackle tough challenges in times of uncertainty. He advocated for a "Team of Teams" approach, where interconnected teams coordinate and lead simultaneously, breaking traditional hierarchical leadership models.

Resilience emerged as a crucial leadership trait, with strategic planning and the capacity to anticipate and respond effectively being paramount in navigating healthcare's complex landscape.

Leadership lessons: putting staff at the heart of healthcare

In conclusion Peter Lachman distilled a transformative message: the key to exceptional healthcare lies in prioritizing staff.

Drawing inspiration from the Marriott hotel's leadership philosophy, Peter argued that when organizations invest in their employees' experience, staff naturally deliver outstanding care. This approach shifts traditional leadership paradigms from focusing on finances and patients to nurturing the workforce first.

The session, bringing together healthcare leaders from India, Africa, Europe, and Latin America, underscored a universal truth: healthcare's future depends on creating supportive, meaningful work environments. By asking "What matters to you?", practicing compassion, and building genuine connections, leaders can transform healthcare systems.

Sustainable healthcare requires a human-centered approach, where supporting staff isn't just a strategy, but a fundamental commitment to care.

Looking Ahead

The WHLNet broadcast on 15 May provided a unique opportunity to learn from leaders across the globe. Each speaker illuminated the ways healthcare leaders around the world are forging solutions under pressure, often with limited resources but limitless determination.

From Nairobi to New Delhi, Lima to Brussels, one message was clear: the future of healthcare depends on how leaders respond today—with courage, compassion, and collaboration.

Resources suggested by participants during the conversation are listed below:

- WHO definition of "Resilient Health Care Systems" <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/health/publication/change-cannot-wait-building-resilient-health-systems-in-the-shadow-of-covid-19>
 - World Bank describes as four essential characteristics of resilient health systems: being aware of threats, agile in response, absorptive to contain shocks, and adaptive to minimize disruptions
- Grunberg, NE & Barry, ES (2022), Health and healthcare as infinite games. Acta Scientific Medical Sciences, 6(3), 110-116. <https://www.actascientific.com/ASMS/ASMS-06-1201.php>
- Paper in BMJ Leader: <https://bmjleader.bmj.com/content/7/4/291>
- Paper on preventable deaths in Belgium: <https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/15/1/e082489>
- Michael West on compassionate leadership: <https://swirlingleafpress.com/compassionate-leadership/>
- And WMTY website : www.wmtty.world
- Kindness one: <https://kindnessinhealthcare.world>
- Social capital book <https://www.pressganey.com/company/leadership/thomas-lee-book-social-capital-in-healthcare/>
- There will be a special session in Utrecht next week during the IHI-BMJ forum on the link between WMTY and Kindness for those who are able to attend (in person). https://internationalforum.bmj.com/utrecht/register/?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=21412792211&gbraid=0AAAAADogWJjDV8BWWj1-

[ACnYcnB7Oa9qf&gclid=Cj0KCQjwxJvBBhDuARIsAGUgNfgJbFH6rVL9AUC7txMZI2_b3lOFHeQ3rqH1IDxkunIYLNwUnXTkfYaAjw2EALw_wcB](https://www.amazon.ca/Art-Being-Kind-Stefan-Einhorn/dp/1933648708?ref=ast_hip&pf_rd_p=8c8c8c8c-8c8c-4c8c-8c8c-8c8c8c8c8c8c&pf_rd_r=8c8c8c8c-8c8c-4c8c-8c8c-8c8c8c8c8c8c)

- A Swedish Oncologist has been talking about kindness for sometime now - Stefan Einhorn. ISBN-13 : 978-1933648705
 - <https://www.amazon.ca/Art-Being-Kind-Stefan-Einhorn/dp/1933648708>
- https://chlnet.ca/wp-content/uploads/Resiliency-Covid-Corner-Oct-21-2020_.pdf

The event recording, biographies of speakers, the briefing note provided to participants and relevant pre-readings will be shared on [CHLNet's website](https://chlnet.ca).