

**Intermountain Healthcare: A Model Health System**

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### **Introduction**

Healing for life. Intermountain Healthcare has adopted the phrase “Healing for Life” as its slogan. Is any healthcare provider really able to accomplish this, or is this just a catchy marketing plan? Could it possibly be both? Any corporation in the health services industry must be able to treat patients with respect and dignity. However, this must be provided at a reasonable cost to the patient. Additionally, one would want a healthcare provider that has been in business for years, with a proven track-record of excellence. Also, the provider needs to be able to reach its potential customers in relevant manners, as well as keeping them engaged with the company. In this paper we will take a deeper look at the integrated healthcare company Intermountain Healthcare. We will take a look at a few key areas of interest that include:

1. The History of Intermountain Healthcare.
2. Marketing and Production.
3. Management Philosophy and Practices.
4. Accounting and Finance, and
5. Ethics and Social Responsibility.

With this paper, the reader will develop a greater understanding of the leading healthcare provider in Utah, and will see that “Healing for Life” is indeed more than a catchy phrase.

### **The History of Intermountain Healthcare**

The history of Intermountain Healthcare begins as most others do in the state of Utah; with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church). In 1905 the LDS Church established LDS Hospital in Salt Lake City, Utah. Six years later in 1911, the LDS Church founded the Primary Children’s Hospital, also in Salt Lake City. Initially, Primary Children’s Hospital served as the pediatric sector of LDS Hospital, but in 1922 it became a “stand-alone facility” (Intermountain Healthcare, 2010). Therefore, Intermountain Healthcare had its humble beginnings around the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the two main hospitals of the LDS Church.

From the early 1900's to the 1970's, the LDS Church had essentially the only healthcare system in Utah, with several other facilities besides LDS and Primary Children's Hospital that included the Utah Valley Hospital in Provo, Utah. In 1970 the LDS Church "integrated its health care system by forming the LDS Health Services Corporation" (Intermountain Health Care, Inc, 1999) to take control of the expanding industry. Also, by that year the LDS Health Services Corporation had 15 hospitals totaling more than 2,000 beds, making it one of the largest health care systems in the nation.

However, by 1974 the LDS Church surprised many with its decision to leave the hospital business. While there were many reasons for the change in direction, from an increased focus in the global efforts of the missionaries to the fact that many of its healthcare facilities were aging and in need of repairs. One of the main reasons for the move may have been the United States Supreme Court ruling in the case of *Roe v. Wade*. With the ruling, abortion became legal nationwide, a practice that was directly contrary to the beliefs of the Church. Due to these factors, the LDS Church was in search of a suitable organization to take over its healthcare operations. In 1975 the LDS Church "gave its hospitals to a new nonprofit entity called Intermountain Health Care" (Intermountain Health Care, Inc, 1999). The gift from the LDS Church consisted of 15 hospitals spanning an area from St. Anthony, Idaho in the north, to Panguitch, Utah in the south. The LDS hospital in Salt Lake City was the largest of the newly acquired facilities for Intermountain Healthcare.

The founding chairman was William N. Jones, and the first president was a businessman and native of Salt Lake City named Scott Parker. Parker had a master's degree in hospital administration from the University of Minnesota and worked as an administrator in Arizona, Minnesota and California. Mr. Parker was to remain the president of Intermountain Healthcare for 23 years; he retired in 1998 (Intermountain Health Care, Inc, 1999). To take Mr. Parker's place, William H. Nelson took the reins of Intermountain Healthcare, which was now one of the top ten nonprofit healthcare systems in the nation. The current president and CEO is Charles W. Sorenson, MD, and the chairman is Ken C. Gardner (Annual Report, 2010).

From the beginning, the LDS Health Services Corporation operated under the idea of providing health care for a reasonable cost. Intermountain continued this practice with the creation of the Associated Hospital

System, or AHS. The sole purpose of the AHS was to reduce the costs of purchases made by the hospitals in the system. In 1984 the AHS merged with another similar organization, the United Hospital System, to form the American Hospital Systems (Intermountain Health Care, Inc, 1999). This new organization was again focused on reducing the cost to the patients by means of increased leverage in its combined purchasing power. Essentially, it could demand lower prices for greater quantities of supplies purchased.

After Intermountain Healthcare's incorporation in 1975, it spent much of its time and resources upgrading and renewing its facilities. However, it also purchased and built new facilities along the way. Throughout the 1980's, Intermountain built several outpatient health facilities, elective surgery facilities and arguably the most beneficial to the community, the InstaCare Centers. The InstaCare system is a string of clinics that are located in residential areas, allowing easy access to healthcare when needed without having to visit a hospital. In 1982 Intermountain created its first at-home nursing service named Home Health Agency. This division was aimed toward healing-at-home and offered services such as physical therapy and medical social work. In addition to this, Intermountain also entered a stage of reorganization, which led to the creation of "five subsidiaries" (Intermountain Health Care, Inc, 1999). These subsidiaries were IHC Hospital, Inc., handling the hospitals; IHC Professional Services, Inc., which "ran surgical centers and ...clinics" (Intermountain Health Care, Inc, 1999); IHC Foundation, Inc., tasked with raising funds for various services; IHC Health Plans, Inc., a form of health insurance; and IHC Affiliated Services, a for-profit organization "with group purchasing programs and computer software sold to other hospitals" (Intermountain Health Care, Inc, 1999).

By the late 1980's, Intermountain realized that it had overstretched itself; it owned surgical centers in California, New Jersey, and Ohio, and so decided to focus on its primary market in the west. The organization began to consolidate its divisions, abandoning the centers in those states, as well as selling IHC Affiliated Services, Inc. The financial struggles continued with a major malpractice lawsuit, *Hunter v. IHC*, against Intermountain in 1982 which dealt with an incident at Utah Valley Hospital in Provo. Intermountain lost the case and was ordered to pay the family of the victim \$4.7 million, the largest malpractice payout in Utah at the time (Intermountain Health Care, Inc, 1999). In addition to the massive payout, another suit was brought up against Intermountain by Utah County. Intermountain was accused of not paying property taxes on property

owned and used for business purposes in Utah County. Intermountain maintained that it should not have to pay based on the fact that it were a ‘charitable’ organization, indeed by 1995 it had provided upwards of “\$130 million in charitable care for patients” (Intermountain Health Care, Inc, 1999). Despite the suit, it did not pay any taxes, and will not have to so long as it continues to prove that it is a charitable institution.

The 1990’s brought new challenges for Intermountain Healthcare. The organization faced three major competitors in its main market of Utah: IASIS Healthcare, MountainStar Healthcare, and the most prominent one, the University of Utah Healthcare Network. Also, in 1997 Intermountain ceased to operate its blood banks and turned that operation over to the American Red Cross. As the decade came to a close, Intermountain was involved in a bribery scandal involving the International Olympic Committee (IOC). The healthcare company was accused of providing three African associates of the IOC with free healthcare totaling around \$28,000. Intermountain maintained that it was just doing its “part of a community effort to win the games, and that IHC had been told that the three individuals lacked adequate funds [for the procedures]” (Intermountain Health Care, Inc, 1999).

The first decade of the new millennium brought better circumstances to Intermountain Healthcare. Among those was the fact that from the year 2000 through the 2005, Intermountain was ranked in the top 2 integrated healthcare systems in the United States. Currently, Intermountain has 23 hospitals in Utah, Wyoming and Idaho which still include Primary Children’s and LDS Hospitals in Salt Lake City, continues to operate the InstaCare clinics, the Intermountain Medical Group, a broad range of clinics and services with over 800 physicians, and health insurance plans from SelectHealth. Intermountain is the largest healthcare provider in the region with more than 32,000 employees (Intermountain Healthcare, 2010).

### **Marketing and Production**

With a corporation as well-established as Intermountain Healthcare comes a wide array of marketing tools. Additionally, one may not think that an organization that serves the community would produce anything, but Intermountain does this as well. Intermountain Healthcare’s marketing and productions include: photographing special events, billboards, fliers, posters, brochures, news releases, articles for newsletters, e-

mails, websites, social media—such as Facebook and Twitter accounts—and videos. The marketing team’s main focus is to convey a positive image for Intermountain Healthcare. It uses a technique called “branding” (The Healthcare Marketing Group, 2010), that creates a mental connection between patients and health care by using slogans and statements such as: healing for life, our commitment to a healing experience, ‘mission, vision, value’, and the six dimensions of care: ‘clinical excellence, service excellence, physician engagement, operational effectiveness, employee engagement, and community stewardship’. This “mental connection” encourages patients’ loyalty and provides security, for health care is a sensitive subject.

Intermountain Healthcare has recently jumped on the band wagon of marketing through networking with familiar names such as: “Twitter, YouTube, Foursquare, and last but not least Facebook”—with more than 50 corporate pages (Hinmon, 2011). Clark Jensen, Marketing Director for Intermountain, and Jason Carlton, who manages Primary Children’s Medical Center social media, are both tasked with looking for the latest ways to stay connected with today’s Facebook-using patients and the “constant challenges” (Hinmon, 2011) presented by rapidly evolving social media.

It took quite some time for Intermountain’s Human Resource and its Information Technology (Intermountain’s eBusiness) departments to accept the influence of social media. Intermountain’s main goal was to reach out to its patients, conferring about “current issues, best practices, case studies and more” (Hinmon, 2011). The marketing team saw potentials in social media; it knew its audience was growing, and moving toward that direction. Intermountain’s marketing group had realized beforehand that if it did not get started soon, it would be too late.

It took nearly three years for Intermountain’s social networks to reach their full potential. Until recently, social networking raised many questions and debates within Intermountain’s family, due to the fact that Intermountain’s social media implementation was “loosely organized” (Hinmon, 2011) and had no one to manage it full-time. This was mainly because everyone in the organization had his or her fair share of “heavy duty” (Hinmon, 2011) responsibilities. One of the concerns regarding social networking and constant updating

of information is that it “[takes]...people away from doing their jobs” (Hinmon, 2011), but human resource directors and others quickly realized that it was not that big of a problem.

Another effective marketing strategy that Intermountain has used is television, radio and internet commercials; ranging from glimpses of the health care processes, to patient’s success stories and testimonials. One commercial in particular shows a woman giving birth and a narration of: “every new life should be seen for what it is, wondrous, tender, [and]...miraculous” (Intermountain Healthcare, 2011). Another successful commercial that Intermountain has used is called “No patient is just another patient” (Intermountain Healthcare, 2010). These convey positive words to illustrate points such as: “we don’t lose sight of the meaning of what we do...that’s why no patient, is never just another patient.” By using the key phrases previously mentioned, patients feel a sense of personal importance and being cared for by a team of professionals, especially during the most vulnerable time in a person’s life.

In addition to Intermountain’s marketing strategies, it is also known to advertise its ‘expertise’ by stating that it is the only healthcare system in the region capable of completing complicated procedures. Intermountain also strives to better care for its patients by conducting extensive research to solve complicated medical mysteries. For example, in 2010 one of Intermountain Healthcare’s “1,275 research” studies (Annual Report, 2010) was to find out what caused a woman to give birth prematurely. In order for clinical trials to occur, experts were tasked with creating a series of tests to determine the cause. Marketing strategies such as those mentioned above, among others, are important for patients who may experience premature births; these show patients that there is a healthcare system available to them that are actively looking for a way to prevent this from happening.

In terms of production, Intermountain produces healthcare services in the community of the intermountain west. One aspect of Intermountain’s mission is to provide services for those who are unable to pay for medical attention. On a daily average, Intermountain’s hospitals treat “415 patients...of these 415 patients, more than 90 will visit an Intermountain emergency room. Nearly 300 people will receive outpatient care, and about 40 patients will spend the night in an Intermountain hospital bed” (Annual Report, 2010). In

2010 Intermountain has spent “\$163 million in assistance—about \$448,000” (Annual Report, 2010)—of free services per day.

### **Management Philosophy and Practices**

Intermountain Healthcare is guided by its Mission, Vision and Values statement. Its mission is “Excellence in the provision of healthcare services to communities in the Intermountain region” (HR Annual Report, 2010). Excellence is something that you will find embedded throughout every layer of Intermountain Healthcare. Intermountain has developed a “Dimensions of Care” model. In this model there are six interlocking circles around one larger circle that represents Extraordinary Care. Each small circle represents an area in which the employees strive for excellence. This symbolizes the idea that excellence cannot exist without Extraordinary Care in every aspect of healthcare.

To test if this was truly recognized and practiced by employees and management, a group of employees were shown the “Dimensions of Care” image and asked if they had seen this and to explain what it was and represented. Three managers were interviewed and each instantly knew what it was. One Project Manager, Amy Petersen, explained it best as “What I do impacts every other aspect of care for the patient. Without clinical excellence, we can’t have physician engagement, and without employee engagement, we can’t have service excellence. It is a circle, it goes on and on. Each team member [is] supporting one another and the system.” Management passed the test, now what about team members? Would they know what this “Dimensions of Care” was and explain it? A total of ten team members were asked the same question, but only half were able to identify the image and to explain the meaning behind it. Three had some understanding of the image but couldn’t describe exactly how it related to their job. Finally, two had no idea and stated they had never seen it before.

Intermountain’s Core Values are: Mutual Respect, Trust, Excellence, and Accountability (Public website, 2011). The same ten entry level employees were asked if they could name any or all of Intermountain’s values. Surprisingly, nearly all of them could name at least 3 out of 4 of the values. Through research it became apparent that Intermountain believes in what is called its Mission, Vision, and Values, and it is integrated from

executives all the way down to front line employees. Perhaps this is why Intermountain has been called a “Model of Healthcare” by President Barack Obama (Daley, 2009). Any company that is able to get its employees rallied behind its Mission Statement, and a truly sincere Vision, will be a strong force.

### **Accounting and Finance**

Intermountain Healthcare is a non-profit organization, meaning every dollar earned must be put back into the company or used to further sustain the company. Although Intermountain is a private company, each year it posts its financial summaries and reports on its public website.

Intermountain’s 2010 Funds were \$4,546,200,000, the majority coming from reimbursement for direct patient care. Like most companies, Intermountain spent in 2010 the majority of its funds, 41%, to pay salaries and benefits to its 32,000 plus employees. Medical Supplies and Services was the second largest portion with 26%, or \$1.18 million, of funds spent. The remainder was spent on bad debts (services provided to patients who were unwilling to pay), utilities, insurance, other maintenance costs, depreciation, and interest. Additionally, \$495.7 million was put away for future corporation costs and savings (Annual Report, 2010).

Intermountain’s accounting and finance department is pretty similar to other large corporations. Each hospital and major department has a director of finance who reports to either a Chief Financial Officer, or a Regional CFO. The CFOs report to the Vice President of Finance who then reports to Bert Zimmerli, the Senior Vice President. Mr. Zimmerli then reports to the President and CEO, Dr. Charles Sorenson. Intermountain refers to its business office as its Revenue Cycle Organization (RCO). The RCO is responsible to support and bring in all revenues and accounts payable for the company. The RCO consists of Customer Service, Billing, Registration, Compliance, Financial Assistance (Charity), Collections, and Appeals departments.

### **Ethics and Social Responsibility**

Milton Friedman, in his article “The Social Responsibility of Business Is to Increase its Profits” states “a group of persons might establish a corporation for an eleemosynary purpose – for example, a hospital or a school. The manager of such a corporation will not have money profit as his objectives but the rendering of

certain services" (Foundations in Business, page 217). In many respects, Intermountain Healthcare's history, finances, marketing, and business model portrays the company's views of ethics and social responsibility. As with many other not-for-profit healthcare organizations, ethics is given a high priority at Intermountain starting with "four ethical principles in all patient interactions: 1) Autonomy; 2) Beneficence; 3) Non-maleficence; and 4) Justice" (Brent James, Quality Improvement, page 170). The vision of Intermountain is "to be a model healthcare system by continually learning and providing extraordinary care in all its dimensions" (Mission, Vision, and Values, page 3).

The organization focuses on five 'Specific Ethics Standards:' fair and ethical business practices, confidentiality and privacy, the work environment, protecting Intermountain's interests, and reporting concerns of misconduct (Code of Ethics, i). Intermountain Healthcare was explicitly named as a provider that "offers high-quality care at a cost well below average" and "a model for the rest of the nation" as well as being called an "island of excellence" by President Barack Obama (Daley, 2009). Intermountain is concerned with the difference between what should take place in patient care and what is actually happening. By implementing processes and data systems to track various facets of the business including medical costs and service outcomes, the quality of service and care has been increased. "When combined with a clinical management structure, the resulting quality control and improvement system has achieved significant, system-wide improvements in clinical results while reducing care-delivery costs" (James, page 170).

One example of this is the electronic clinical-information and medical record systems Intermountain's Dr. Homer Warner began pioneering as early as 1965, having a functioning system in place by 1979. "Today, Intermountain is considered one of the most "wired" health-care delivery systems in the country" (James, page 169). Intermountain was the only Utah healthcare system to receive the 2011 Healthcare Most Wired Award. This national award has been given for 13 years by H&HN magazine and Intermountain has received this award the last 12 years. However, incumbent with such an extensive involvement in electronic records is the self-imposed obligation to protect the information, especially the privacy of the patient. Intermountain set up the Information Security Committee, which reports to "Intermountain's senior management and Board of Trustees." This committee has generated and refined organizational policy to protect patient privacy and confidentiality for

almost 15 years (James, page 169). The protection of information is part of the Specific Ethics Standard of the responsibility to fair and ethical business practices (*Code of Ethics*, page 4). Highlighting the superiority of the system, James pronounces, “Because few other care-delivery settings have internal governance structures and information subsystems that closely parallel those found at Intermountain, few systems will find Intermountain’s ethical oversight structure a perfect fit” (James, page 170).

The commitment to the values of Trust, Excellence, Accountability, and Mutual Respect (*Code of Ethics*, page 3) extends beyond the business side of the organization. As stated in Intermountain Healthcare’s *Mission, Vision, and Values* pamphlet, the “vision is to be a model healthcare system by continually learning and providing extraordinary care in all its dimensions” (page 3). William Shaw states “*Medical Economics* [a professional journal] probably suspects that even in our capitalist society many people, including probably most doctors, would not like to think of physicians simply as medical entrepreneurs who are in it for the money” (Discussion Case, page 1). Hearing that hospitals charged on average 2.5 times as much for items used in the care of a patient causes the patient to question the motives behind the care given (Preidt, 2011). In contrast, according to Greg Poulsen, senior vice president at Intermountain, “I think that in Utah, that the providers here often do the right thing in spite of the fact that it's not what is financially rewarded. And around the country, that's less true than it is here” (Daley, 2009).

Another illustration of Intermountain Healthcare’s ethics is in its vision statement concerning operational effectiveness: “We will be wise and careful stewards of our resources to enable extraordinary care. We will maintain the financial strength we need to meet our high standards of quality while providing the lowest sustainable cost to residents in our communities” (*Mission, Vision, and Values*, page 3). Intermountain lives up to this decree by providing care for many patients regardless of their ability to pay, as well as providing financial assistance at all hospitals and clinics, amounting to more than \$163 million in charity care. Intermountain also owns or operates 19 community clinics that serve uninsured and low-income patients while giving financial support to independent community clinics throughout the Intermountain area (2010 Annual Report, pages 4, 28). One of the values of Intermountain Healthcare, Community Stewardship, states “we work independently and with community partners to care for the underserved, and we provide generally available medical services to all

residents, regardless of the ability to pay" (*Mission, Vision, and Values*, page 3). Because Intermountain is a non-profit company it is committed to community involvement as stated in its mission statement. An extension of this practice is the employee tuition reimbursement program. The Director of the Employee Assistance Program, Terri Flint, says, "Intermountain Healthcare really is committed to the holistic well-being of our employees. That's why we have tuition reimbursement for education, that's why we have health benefits, that's why we have our retirement plan. We want people to be happy" (Working for Intermountain Healthcare, video). In 2010 tuition reimbursement was given to nearly 3,000 employees and amounted to over \$5.5 million (2010 HR Annual Report).

Finally, the mission of Intermountain: "Excellence in the provision of healthcare services to communities in the Intermountain region" is completed and enriched by the value of service excellence. The value: "We will provide a compassionate healing experience that reflects the caring and noble nature of our work in every encounter with our patients, members, and guests" (*Mission, Vision, and Values*, page 3). Meg Danielson, RN Manager of Health and Wellness at SelectHealth, a subsidiary of Intermountain Healthcare, says, "It's wonderful to work for a corporation that walks the walk; talks the talk with the mission of high quality health care" (Working for Intermountain Healthcare, video). The Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems, or HCAHPS, and the Federation of American Hospitals conducted a survey in which they asked whether patients would recommend their hospital to others. The results of the survey showed that the small, rural, forty-one-bed Garfield Memorial Hospital and Clinics in Panguitch, Utah, was the highest-rated hospital in the country, with 100% of patients surveyed saying they would definitely recommend it to family and friends, while the national average was 67% (DerGurahian, 2008). The hospital was first owned and operated by Garfield County, then by the LDS Church and later by Intermountain Healthcare. However in 2000 "after years of financial losses that Intermountain said it could no longer sustain, an arrangement was worked out transferring ownership to the county" while operations continued under Intermountain's management. Local residents formed a foundation with the help of Intermountain to sustain the regional hospital (Johnson, 2009). This demonstrates Intermountain Healthcare's commitment to the entire region and how the organization works with the communities which it serves.

Kendall Willardson, Laboratory Manager at Intermountain Healthcare, declares, “The amazing thing with Intermountain is that we are always looking to get better. Nationally, we are one of the top integrated healthcare systems” (Working for Intermountain Healthcare, video). The *Our Commitment* (n.d.) flyer explains the commitment of each employee for a healing experience for all patients and guests of an Intermountain Healthcare facility: “As an Intermountain Healthcare employee, I am committed to creating an extraordinary experience for those I serve. I help you feel safe, welcome and at ease. I listen to you with sensitivity and respond to your needs. I treat you with respect and compassion. I keep you informed and involved. I ensure our team works with you. I take responsibility to help solve problems.”

### **Conclusion**

Intermountain Healthcare has made its presence known throughout Utah and the intermountain west. The organization provides accessible, quality healthcare to the community. Intermountain is truly an organization that lives by the core principals of business. They are vigilant of their finances, have a solid history within the communities they serve, and are constantly innovating itself as an organization. Its slogan, “Healing for Life,” is well known amongst its staff and is imbedded in its culture, which is why the company has received so much national attention and respect from our nation’s leader. As this company continues to strive for excellence in all that it does, patients and the communities it serves can all rely on it for quality healthcare services.

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