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What are your thoughts on the current landscape of the mental health and wellbeing ecosystem?

When we look at year on year rates of depression and suicide across all groups from a US focused lens, we have sustained over a decade of worsening outcomes, as opposed to multiple decades of gains in treatment of heart disease and cancer. The pandemic made the situation worse and was a huge blow to emotional

well being that is still unfolding. The pandemic undermined a lot of institutions we relied on, disrupted the nature of employment, caused economic displacement, in addition to the grief, trauma and impact of the real losses that the pandemic caused.

We are in an unprecedentedly bad place in terms of people's mental wellbeing in contemporary times, even though we have the tools and treatments to help and therefore should be doing better. We have effective treatments for nearly any mental health condition able to help most people, and as many as two thirds to 80% of people for conditions like mood disorders and anxiety, but yet we are doing worse every year.

What is the biggest challenge currently facing the space, and how do we overcome it?

I think the biggest challenge is that we force people to self-identify their mental illness. We don't give people help until



they, or someone around them, realizes they are ill. We used to do this for heart disease and cancer, and what we have learnt to do with both conditions is detect the disease before the patient knows they're ill. We have not done this for mental health, even though we have the technology to do so. The US preventive task force recommends that we screen every child for depression beginning at age 12 and every child for anxiety beginning at age 8, and yet research shows that we still on average wait 8-10 years after symptoms emerge to detect these conditions today. As a result, people are much more impaired by the time we begin to provide care. As a rule, we tend to wait until people are in a crisis, rather than supporting them years earlier when their suffering could have been helped much more readily.

What are the main opportunities for transformation?

I think the biggest opportunity involves

retooling and transforming primary care, particularly pediatric primary care. Most illnesses begin by the age of 14; 75% by the time your brain stops developing in your mid-20s. We have to deploy in primary care: that's how we got ahead of cancer and heart disease. We have tools with decades of evidence behind them and payment methods for models like collaborative care which are highly efficacious for disorders such as anxiety and depression. This would also help our workforce issue because if we are truly effectively serving as many people as possible in primary care, it will create the infrastructure for more severe disorders being able to migrate to specialists. Primary care also gives us infrastructure for early detection and measurement based care.

Since these are pediatric illnesses by and large, the biggest opportunities exist in leveraging pediatric primary care and school settings for early detection and treatment. There are also many digital solutions that can



enable us to deploy quicker, overcome distance through telehealth and more readily and smartly collect information for measurement based care.

What is Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute's vision for the future of mental health policy?

Our vision centers on two things: the first is to leverage primary care, like we have used for conditions, for early detection and early identification, and to take it seriously. While we have had the tools to do this for decades, we have only recently begun to leverage federal and state structures to enforce regulations to hold payers accountable for parity and end the discrimination against mental illness. The second part of this vision centers on continuing to improve how we address health needs broadly, not just for mental illness, but for all health needs in order to be more person centered in a robust way. We need to center more on the lived experience of individuals.

What are you most looking forward to at the Future of Mental Healthcare: West Summit?

I am looking forward to being with a bunch of other people who care about the same things I do in order to share ideas and hopefully leave thinking a bit differently. This is a time of intense change and we saw with Covid how quickly new detection, treatment and prevention regimes can be brought to scale. With Covid, we pivoted quickly, and hopefully we can all come together to inspire each other, help each other take similar pivots and get ahead of the mental health crisis.

We already have the knowledge how to make this happen; we have the existing tech and evidence. We need to stop waiting for the future, but instead push into the future with these effective tools and make them available universally.

You can hear more from Andy Keller at the **Future of Mental Healthcare West Summit** on November 9th-10th in the Bay Area, CA.