Editorial Board Spotlight:
Mark J. Baumel, MD, MS

Sonja Sherritze (Editor, MediMedia USA, Inc.)

For the second month in a row, I am pleased to introduce a new P&T editorial board member. Dr. Mark Baumel is Chief Medical Officer (CMO) and Senior Vice-President of Medical Management at the Mercy Health System of Southeast Pennsylvania, a five-member acute-care hospital system in the Philadelphia region.

In his role as the chief physician executive at Mercy, Dr. Baumel has systemwide responsibility for issues and departments related to (1) medical management, including clinical performance improvement, clinical effectiveness, advanced clinical delivery models, and case management issues; (2) medical education, including a 150-resident graduate medical education program, continuing medical education, and system academic affiliations; and (3) quality and patient-safety programs. He also serves as a liaison to managed care. He is responsible for, among other things, the creation and oversight of a systemwide denials-management program that reduced systemwide managed care payment denials by 25%. He also created and oversaw a physician-led length-of-stay (LOS) management program that resulted in a 20% reduction in Medicare LOS in some hospitals. Dr. Baumel has achieved these objectives and many others in only two years on the job.

What else is involved in being the chief physician executive?
“Lots of ‘ad hoc’ duties,” Dr. Baumel says with a laugh. “Positions like mine are always in flux. Our system, since I’ve joined, has gone from four hospitals to three hospitals to six to five, all in a period of two years. And so there are always new challenges—there’s the closing of a hospital, there’s integrating new hospitals, and so on. Right now we’re creating system strategies around the [medical] malpractice crisis here in southeastern Pennsylvania. This has been a critical component of my job in the last two months.”

Part of his task in developing the patient-safety program at Mercy was to coordinate and oversee the emergency preparedness system, including smallpox and bioterrorism planning. He also negotiated and currently manages a multiyear payer/health system collaborative project with Independence Blue Cross that provides financial incentives for system improvement on clinical indicators and patient-safety goals. The program is described as the first of its type in the region, but that might be underselling it.

“It may well be the first of its type in the country,” Dr. Baumel admits.

Some of the goals of the quality incentive payment project include the complete use of protective free-flow infusion pumps; active use of a medication-safety hotline; the use of clinical pharmacists in critical-care units; appropriate use of deep venous thromboembolism prophylaxis; and the prevention of perioperative wound infection through effective antibiotic regimens.

Prior to becoming the CMO at Mercy, Dr. Baumel was Director of the Clinical Effectiveness Unit at MedStar Health (formerly Helix/Medlantic), a seven-hospital health care system in the Baltimore–Washington region. In this role, he oversaw the creation, implementation, and outcomes tracking of clinical quality improvement and cost-effectiveness initiatives across the system, including a managed care organization with 150,000 covered lives. His unit also served as a force for clinical integration across the newly merged system.

What made him decide to become a physician in the first place?
In the beginning, he says, it was a desire to participate in a people-oriented profession and to merge his academic interests with a mission of service. Now he likes being able to influence a “much bigger arena” through systems of care.

“As a clinician, the main focus of my efforts was on helping individuals. Now the focus is on creating systems that support others who help individuals.”

Dr. Baumel is a former full-time practicing internist in a staff-model HMO within Sharp Healthcare, in San Diego, California. While at MedStar Health, he attended in the Internal Medicine Clinic at Franklin Square Hospital in Baltimore. He currently serves as an inpatient attending physician in the Mercy Internal Medicine teaching program and has an appointment as Clinical Assistant Professor of Medicine at Drexel University of Medicine in Philadelphia. He has conducted and published clinical research in the field of obstructive sleep apnea.

Dr. Baumel received a BS degree at the University of Notre Dame and earned an MS in Clinical Epidemiology and Biostatistics from the University of Pennsylvania. He received an MD degree from the University of Chicago Pritzker School of Medicine and completed his clinical training in Internal Medicine and Pulmonary/Critical Care/Sleep Medicine at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania. He is board-certified in internal medicine, pulmonary medicine, and sleep disorders medicine.

His most difficult and rewarding job, however, is being the father of two children, ages five and seven.

“I’m first and foremost a father, and my family is a huge part of my life,” he says. “My wife is a full-time gastroenterologist [in Wilmington, Delaware], so we’re juggling a lot. It’s always a challenge trying to strike a balance between a very busy professional life and staying in touch with your kids.” Fortunately, he says, “I’m a very active person—I don’t sit still for long. When I’m home, I’m doing active stuff with the kids—I’m cycling or hiking or canoeing.”

Being active helps him function efficiently at work too. “I have the type A personality that I guess goes well with the position,” he explains.