

## INTERVIEW: Dr. John Tedeschi, Improving health care



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*A weekly Q&A with a member of the local business community.*

Dr. John Tedeschi grew up in Camden above his father's Italian grocery store.

"I was educated in Camden (he did his internship and residency at Cooper Hospital) and I still have a lot of dedication to the city," the pediatrician notes.

"Camden remains in my soul."

The founder and CEO of Advocare, Tedeschi has been a physician since 1967 and an unintentional businessman for half that time. One to always "think out of the box," he has always cared about where the health care profession was - and is - going.

Tedeschi has developed new and creative strategies to improve pediatric health care, guided by his belief that "children are the future of our society, and their well-being is critical to the future." In 1998 Dr. T, as he is known, launched Advocare - originally known as Children's Health Associates - envisioning a partnership in which physicians could collaborate on best practices, build relationships with patients and maximize health and wellness.

Seven years after the creation of Advocare, Tedeschi formed Continuum Health Alliance, the health care management arm of Advocare and other medical groups. "It's always been about the care," he said recently during a phone call he took between meetings. "It's always been about what we can do better for the patient."

**Question: Why did you see a need for the creation of a physicians group like Advocare?**

**Answer:** After years in private practice, a new world of health care arose in the early 1980s, when managed care companies like Aetna and US Healthcare arrived. I began educating myself on where health care was going, and eventually I formed the New Jersey Pediatric Group.

By 1996, about 85 pediatricians were in this group I was managing. I looked at it and thought it was crazy - we could be better if we integrated. So I invited 30 of them to join a fully integrated group. I called MGMA (Medical Group Management Association) - an outstanding health care consulting group - and told them I wanted to integrate these doctors but I didn't want their autonomy to be lost. I was very concerned with the survivability of their private practice and

wanted to offer these physicians an opportunity to make their practice more successful for them.

**Q: Advocare now has more than 600 primary care physicians, specialists and nurse practitioners. How did it grow so much?**

**A:** At first, I decided not to grow the group at all. I wanted to put the infrastructure together where we would have great protocols, deliver good medicine and have the means to track and measure everything. You can't say you're the best unless you can prove you're the best through comprehensive data. That was very important to me.

**Q: How did you manage the transition from being a doctor, to being a doctor and a businessman?**

**A:** To be honest, I put a lot of strong business people behind me. We have an amazing team and organization of about 400 employees that do the management. I'm not the smartest businessman in the group, but I never let anyone forget our mission that we are responsible to the children, to the patients and to the communities we serve. We always have to remember that.

**Q: What do you think of the Affordable Care Act?**

**A:** The ACA is very, very important to me in that we participate in what we have to do to make health care reasonable. The triple aim of the ACA is increased quality, increased patient satisfaction and access and decreased costs.

**Q: AmeriChoice, one of the managed care organizations serving Medicaid patients in New Jersey, recently terminated its longtime contract with Advocare. What happened?**

**A:** I don't really know what that was all about. We were very friendly and had established some really good programs and initiatives that were rewarding for the patient. Advocare was even named a "Top Quality Organization" by AmeriChoice three or four times.

A lot of our longtime patients were very upset. But I'm happy to say a solution is imminent. We will soon be joining with AmeriGroup, a national leader in Medicaid insurance. I'm happy we were able to get a fast resolution to this situation.

**Q: What's on your health care horizon?**

**A:** We want to continue to grow and take in more specialty physicians to provide a better for our patients. We want to keep ahead of the game by providing management care teams of physicians, nurses, social workers and pharmacists for our patients. It's always been about the same thing: How can we make it better for our patients and our community?

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