

Primary Care Cures

Episode 61: Andrew Poles #1

Ron Barshop:

Most problems in healthcare are fixed already. Primary care is already cured on the fringes. Reversing burnout, physician shortages, bad business models, forced buy outs, factory medicine, high-deductible insurance that squeezes the docs and is totally inaccessible to most of the employees. The big squeeze is always on for docs. It's the acceleration of cost and the deceleration of reimbursements. I want you to meet those on this show that are making a difference with host, Ron Barshop, CEO of Beacon Clinics, that's me.

Ron Barshop:

Nothing is going to be the same again. You heard the bumper music is now more upbeat because I thought the last one was more COVID-19. Now I'm going for a better future where everybody wins music. That's why you've heard a new change. We don't need to be depressed right now. We need to look at this as an opportunity, at least I am. I see a future where everybody wins. My particular vehicle for that is direct contracting with employers, direct to hospitals, direct to imaging companies, direct to pharmacy, direct to their physician, their primary care physician. I'm creating an opportunity where the smartest people I know are getting together and talking about that future and making that a reality. Because today, if you're trying to reach your primary care physician, 80% of them do not have telehealth.

Ron Barshop:

Don't you wish your doctor had telehealth so you could text them, email them, call them at any hour you need to? Well, that is the world of direct primary care and virtual primary care. That is the world of onsite clinics until a few days ago. We can't go to our onsite clinics anymore. The broken glass in the mirror right now is primary care as a model is broken. It does not service as it has in the past 200 years. Today we're looking at direct primary care is a very solid model where I can reach my doctor. Remember, I've told you this before, but my employees today have zero turnover because they can contact and access a doctor 24/7 in two languages. My absenteeism is virtually zero, absolutely virtually zero. They're not coming to work sick and presenteeism either because they have access 24/7, no copay, no deductible.

Ron Barshop:

I can rail on about that, but the more important subject I want to bring up is how are we treating people and how are we communicating with people in healthcare today when a lot of the spigots are turned off? Andrew Poles is a world-class speaking consultant. Andrew, welcome to the show.

Andrew Poles:

It's great to be back, Ron. Thanks for having me back.

Ron Barshop:

We are excited to talk about communicating strategies with healthcare, people in our family, with healthcare workers that we're going to be confronting directly and indirectly with. These are folks that are working in about as high as stress situation as maybe I can remember in my lifetime. Can you think of anything even remotely resembling it, maybe 2008, 2009, Andrew?

Andrew Poles:

I don't think there's really anything in my lifetime that has any proximity to the level of stress and anxiety this is causing for people.

Ron Barshop:

My strategy is to be gentle with people right now. I kind of always am, but I am finding myself flaring up cooped up with my wife, I'm not getting the social animal machine I need to feed my personality. It's a very frustrating time. Do you have any strategies for making ourselves more social in a time when we can't be?

Andrew Poles:

I think to the extent that it's workable right now, I like the idea of people having micro-gatherings. Maybe it's three people in an open space like a park where you don't have to worry about services in someone's home. Where people can come together and have a conversation where they're physically with each other. The other thing I think is really important about that, whether it's done in person or whether it's done virtually on a conference call or a video conferencing system, I think it's really important right now that we have our attention on having everybody in the conversation land. You talked about that in the domain of healthcare, but I think it's applicable everywhere. What is it going to take for me to have you win on this podcast? What can I bring to this conversation that's going to have you win causing the transformation you're out to cause for people in North America through primary care.

Andrew Poles:

If I have my attention on that and I'm listening for that and I'm thinking about that and I really do care about you winning, whether I come up with an effective strategy for you or not, you're going to experience my authentic commitment and concern for what you're up to. That will create a kind of connection in our relationship that's very nurturing. It's also critical for the human being, for the human animal that we are to have those kinds of connections and relationships. I think that's what's critical about these meetings is not just that they happen, which is great in and of itself valuable, but that underlying it there's a commitment there with everybody. Lift each other up and have one another win.

Ron Barshop:

I have a conversation I need to have with a dear friend of mine. When this first started 10, 12 days ago, "Ron, what would you do if you could get something out to every household in America?" I said, "A pulse oximeter goes on your pointer finger every time you go see the doctor." What it's measuring is the oxygenation of your blood underneath your fingernail. It's extremely accurate, incredibly simple because it says 100% or 0% or some number in the middle. The minute your pulse ox drops below 97 this is a signal to your doctor or your caregiver

that there's problems. If COVID-19 is a pneumonia-induced event, we can tell when your oxygen starts dropping as your lungs are starting to fill with fluid. I said, "I would have a pulse ox in every home that has a suspicion of flu. Because they can watch for the pneumonia and catch it early and know when they should go to the ER as opposed to flooding the ER when they're going to have to waste your time triaging and perhaps infect your whole family."

Ron Barshop:

That pulse ox, there were 15,000 bought the next day by this guy. He's got this saved the world complex, but it doesn't stop there, Andrew. This is where I need your help. He then went to YouTube and he figured out how to make an oxygen concentrator, which is a non-FDA approved device. I'll be damned, he came up with a machine that pumps out basically 10 times, well 20 times as much oxygen as your lungs can actually bear and at a concentration double that your lungs can bear. He's created another way of creating death that he didn't even know about. Your and my lungs cannot take that kind of oxygen at that kind of pressure and survive. What conversation should I have with him because he's starting to post this device everywhere as if it's some sort of a miracle solution?

Andrew Poles:

Okay, good. I think that what's challenging about the conversation obviously and what's right there for people when they look at these kinds of conversations is, "If I say what I'm really thinking, is this person going to get upset and react and will I be effective? What will be the consequence or the impact on our relationship?" Those are the kinds of concerns that are often there for people about conversations which are kind of in the background for people and they never deal with directly. People generally try to work around that by being strategic in some way, which ultimately leaves them being inauthentic.

Andrew Poles:

What I find is effective with that is actually to bring what's there in the background to the foreground. What that might look like, for example, is you say, "Listen, I want to have a conversation with you. I have this big concern that if we have this conversation, you're going to be upset with me or it's going to damage our relationship or it's going to take the wind out of your sails. I'm not sure, but I want to tell you my commitment in the conversation. My commitment in the conversation is to empower you to make the difference that you're out to make. Can we have that conversation?"

Andrew Poles:

When you deal with what's in the background up front, before you even get into it, it creates trust. It creates a way for the person you're speaking to, to listen so that they get you're on their side. It's been shown through the neuroscience of communication that establishing that baseline of trust, which gets created through authenticity and transparency, that the opportunity for people coming together and co-creating solutions goes way, way up. That's my coaching that I give to people and in my workshops is you always got to begin with a foundation of trust, transparency, authenticity. That's how I would approach it, Ron.

Ron Barshop:

I have a second situation I want to bring up with you. You're probably going to give you the same answer because I know you well, Andrew. The second situation is, and I'm going to call them out. The CEO of Lifetime Fitness sent me an email a couple of days ago, which I'm assuming he sent out to, if not hundreds of thousands, millions of members of this gym, wonderful gym. He says, "The best thing you can do for yourself is kill the virus by going into a sauna or a steam room." I'm kind of in the lung pulmonary business because I'm not a doctor, but I play one on TV and that I have allergy labs. My allergy labs I've learned a lot about lung function because asthma is pretty much if you have asthma, you pretty much have allergies. If you have allergies, you don't pretty much have asthma, they're not mutually exclusive.

Ron Barshop:

What happens when you bring in hot air from a steam room or a sauna into your lungs, is it cools down like a machine. It just cools down to your 98.6 or frankly even cooler, and you would burn your lungs if you did do what he said, which is inhale 102 degrees of heat. I mean your alveoli would be fried worse than the COVID's going to fry it. I corrected him. I posted it on LinkedIn. I had several thousand followers say, "Thank you for this information." Now he didn't get back to me. He's probably got a million things to do other than respond to Ron Barshop, but how do you politely and cleanly correct somebody when they're giving bad information that you know for a fact may be harmful to a lot of people?

Andrew Poles:

I like to give people two types of coaching with those kinds of questions, Ron. I like to give people the sense of the nature of the issue as well as the function. In other words, what is this really about? Then what does it look like to act in a way that's effective? I think the nature of this that people need to come to an understanding about is that people's actions are not necessarily consistent with what they know or understand or information that is founded. People's actions are actually in a dance with or correlated with the way they see situations.

Andrew Poles:

For example, a lot of people know that if you want to be healthy, you should exercise and eat a certain way. They totally understand that, but they don't do it. Or people understand that when they talk a certain way to their partner or their spouse, it really upsets them. That if they didn't do that, their relationship would be much more powerful, but they still do it. People don't act on things that they know or understand. That's really important to get in the domain of communication. People have got to grasp that people's actions are consistent with their view of the situation they're dealing with. That's the nature of this. Whatever people do or say in these situations, you have to be sensitive to that if you want someone to alter their behavior, what you're really after is having them alter the way they see something and giving them information doesn't necessarily do that.

Ron Barshop:

I got to tell you that's a great example. I was standing in line at the grocery store to get in and next to me was a registered nurse. She's a nice enough lady and we had a nice visit while we're waiting because what else are you going to do? While we're talking and she says registered nurse, I recoil probably a little more too physically. I said, "Are you working with patients every

day?" She says, "No. I work for one of the big insurance companies and I do telephone work for them." I said, "Thank God." She goes, "I know. I feel like there's a lot of shaming going on with healthcare workers right now."

Ron Barshop:

I mean, it'd be like I had to sneeze so bad 10 minutes later when I got in the store because some strong cologne passed me by. Man, I was worried about sneeze-shaming. The whole universe is going to run away from me when I sneeze from that cologne. How do we do our best to not shame our healthcare workers that we're running into in the grocery store line and reframe it so that they're just another human being like us that needs some love too?

Andrew Poles:

One thing that's really, really, really powerful in the domain of communication is acknowledgement. We got to talk a little bit on our last show together that an experience of being known and understood creates a very, very powerful experience of connection. That includes the release of really, really important neurotransmitters like dopamine in the brain. Acknowledgement goes a long way towards creating that. I think if you're with a healthcare worker and you do understand that right now those men and women are so under the gun, they are being forced to be heroes in a war that the odds are greatly stacked against them, I think whatever you could authentically say to them to acknowledge them will leave them with an experience of being appreciated even if you're increasing your distance from them physically.

Andrew Poles:

Like, "Wow, gosh. I can't even imagine what it's like to be you in a hospital every day and the risk you're undertaking. I'm so glad you're doing what you're doing. I cannot thank you enough for putting yourself in harm's way like that and taking care of people."

Ron Barshop:

Did you ever have anybody in your life, Andrew, that served you by ... I used to have breakfast with sort of a father figure. Bobby would always say to the people sitting next to us that were wearing the military veterans hats, "God bless you for serving me." I just really took that to heart and I started using that every time I met somebody in the military is, "Thank you for serving." Should we be saying that same thing to our healthcare workers in our lives?

Andrew Poles:

I think so. The thing about it is it's got to be authentic. If you turn it into a slogan, it'll lose all of its power. People should just find whatever way of expressing that that's real for them and say it that way. As long as it's authentic for you, even if the words are clumsy or whatever, the person you're talking to will get it. People get what's behind what you say way more powerfully than whatever words you use to express it. The key thing is have it be authentic.

Ron Barshop:

Actually my first guest on the show, Dr. Dave Berg, was so good that he did three of our first five shows. He's a visionary. I wanted to get his take on what's going on right now, but he has 150,000 patients in Arizona. He's got bigger fish to fry than Ron Barshop's friendship. We've

always been really good. I mean, if it's midnight, we'll return each other's calls and he's not been good at it. He explained to me when we finally talk yesterday, "I've got five minutes. Let's set aside two hours on Saturday morning like we normally talk. Get your cigar out and let's relax and enjoy each other."

Ron Barshop:

We're going to get that talk in. But I was being very judgmental, but here he is a healthcare worker and I forget that. I just think, "Hey, he's not being my good friend now," but he is actually being a much more important role than a big good friend to me right now. He's taking care of his population. Is there other ways that we can express our love and our gratitude for those that are the heroes in this battle right now that we're about to see for the next six months with just random small acts of kindness in addition to our communication style? What strategies are you recommending in your seminars to showing love and kindness just in the smallest of ways?

Andrew Poles:

I think one thing you can do that's really, really simple is ask them how they're doing. For the most part, they're being asked to provide, to give, to serve and they have to actually do a lot of diagnosis and treatment, et cetera. I think it's really powerful just to ask him, "Hey, how are you doing? How are you handling all this?" Give them the opportunity to really express what they're going through and have somebody get it. That's one thing.

Andrew Poles:

A second thing you can do if you know someone in that boat is literally do anything, like literally anything that is some kind of a gesture or a gift. Send them Tiff's Treats, if Tiff's Treats in Texas here is still delivering or drop something off on their doorstep or just leave him a voicemail saying, "Listen, I was thinking about you today. I just wanted you to know I'm keeping you in my thoughts." Anything that you do, any gesture that you make that expresses your genuine concern for them and your appreciation, will be felt tenfold by them. The experience that another human being thought of you outside of the context of them needing you is so powerful for human beings.

Ron Barshop:

I was standing in line with her and in the first opener she says to me, Andrew, is that, "I can't find any kale. I have a kale addiction." We get in the store. We're kind of doing the same circle that everybody does in the grocery store. I find just pounds and pounds of kale that must've just freshly arrived. I just go grab an armful of it and I stick it in her bin as she's shopping. She just looks at me and starts laughing like it was a little bit of a joke, but I think I did exactly what you're talking about was just showing a little bit of kindness. I maybe should've let her in front of me in line, but the kale joke was a pretty good joke.

Andrew Poles:

In addition to being a great joke, which you made me laugh by the way, is that she also got to have the experience that someone got her. Again, that releases dopamine in the brain. It gives people the experience that they're connected. There isn't anything more critical to the health of a

human being as a social animal than that experience. You gave her that experience. It wasn't a hard thing to do, but I promise you, she thought about that the rest of her day and maybe even throughout the week. Very powerful what you did.

Ron Barshop:

We were talking and I said, "What are you short on right now? What can I do to help you?" She said, "Well, I can't get any salmon." I said, "I have pounds of it in my freezer. I can't eat it all. I have it delivered every month and I'm backlogged. If you come by and my wife and I give you salmon, than once you give me your 13-year-old boy who could do some chores around my house and slave labor for about a week?" She said, "You can have him. He's yours."

Ron Barshop:

Powerful listening, we've talked about the importance of small acts of kindness and love. We've talked about really being there and asking how you're feeling or how are you doing with all of this. Those are really great tools. What can we be doing remotely for our healthcare workers, Andrew, that gives them love, much like somebody who's on the frontline of a war in Iraq? We send them care packages with food and postcards from home and stuff like that. Is there something we can be doing for emergency wards or critical care in terms of sending them something or doing something kind for them?

Andrew Poles:

I could speculate about that as a human being if I look at it from the perspective of communication. I think what I would do if I were in that boat is I'd actually started talking to some people who are in the thick of it to give me some feedback about what kinds of things would make the biggest difference for people in that situation. Because otherwise I'm just going to try to figure it out from my own very limited sets of experiences and understanding because I'm not a healthcare worker.

Andrew Poles:

I would actually go to someone like my brother who's an ER doc in Colorado, which is kind of a hot zone right now or the pharmacist I talked to today. I talked to a pharmacist today who's here in Austin who had to go and deal with someone who coded out in the hospital because he's part of the code team. He's shared with me as a pharmacist they called him to go deal with a code. He runs down there. There's no time to glove up. There's no time to put on a gown. There's no time to put on a mask. He's got to start pumping this woman's chest.

Andrew Poles:

To his credit, they saved this woman and then they tested her for the COVID virus. They don't have the results back yet, but you can only imagine what's going through his mind. I said, "Did you have a chance to put on your mask?" He's like, "When someone says your mom's dying, you don't go, "Where are the gloves?" You jump right on there and start pumping their chest."

Andrew Poles:

See that's something I never would have thought about had I not talk to him about what he was going through. I think it's important if we're going to do something like that, if you're not

intimately connected with it is actually asks some people, find out, "What would make the biggest difference for y'all right now," and provide that.

Ron Barshop:

In the midst of a week when I've had to let six people go, I've had to let an equal number of contractors go that are K-1 employees. I've had to really get my company outfitted for the future to be healthy and strong for this as we're dropping in primary care volume about half. My best friend calls me this morning and his daughter flips his car three times yesterday. She snuck out of the house, 16 year old, wanted to be with other 16 year olds. Sick and tired of being with her folks like a typical 16 year old, nothing uncommon there, but she almost killed herself in her effort to just go do the wrong thing.

Ron Barshop:

Now he says to me, "Ron, what should I say to my daughter now? I don't want her running away. I don't want her feeling my pain and my hurt of what she's done, but I've got to communicate with my daughter." This is a difficult one, Andrew. I didn't tell you I was going to give you a hardball.

Andrew Poles:

No, that's all right. Actually, I'm glad that this one came up. I think, again, if you start with the principal and then you go to the function. The first thing is you really got to go get where that person is at, the 16 year old is at so that whatever conversation you have can be effective. You can't shove a square peg in a round hole. If there's a round hole, you need a round peg or you need to make the whole square.

Andrew Poles:

The first thing is we've got to get where she's at. I would promise you one of the places that 16 year old is at, however it gets expressed, is that she feels guilty. She feels responsible. She probably doesn't see a way to make up for what she's done. She can't pay for the car. She can't take away the impact on her parents of their worry. Right now she's in a tough spot. I think what's important for us as parents ultimately is that whatever happens to our kids in life long as they're safe, what we ultimately want us to equip them for being powerful with life.

Andrew Poles:

Now our instinct is to react and be angry because we're threatened. We're scared. We're afraid for their life, but that's not going to be effective. I think what we need to start with is giving her an opportunity to just communicate, give her the opportunity to communicate, "Hey, I know you might be worried about me being upset, but don't worry about me. We're going to work all this out together. How are you doing? Tell me what's going on with you. What are you feeling right now? What do you need to tell me?"

Andrew Poles:

Create as big an opening as you can for that child to start to communicate with you. If you stay committed to something that makes a difference like guiding her through this, giving her a way

to get it complete for herself and for you, you'll work it out together. But you've got to start with where they're at so you know what you can say that they can hear.

Ron Barshop:

The messages that I have learned that we don't get in our childhood. I'm calling them unmet needs of the family, messages that sound like this. I gave him this strategy last time we had this conversation about Carolyn about three months ago. The first message is this, "You are enough. You're more than enough." The second message is that, "The world needs you so badly right now. You are exactly what the world needs." The third message is, "I love you no matter what."

Ron Barshop:

Unconditional love, if you roll a car three times, I love you no matter what. I love you maybe even a little bit more because now I know we need to talk. Those three messages, if we could get those a thousand times for every time our parents told us, "No. Don't. Stop. Quit. You're driving me crazy," then we would all be different people today. Do you agree with me that most men and women that are adults walking around have a lot of unmet needs for love?

Andrew Poles:

Yeah, absolutely. I think, Ron, you're right in the bullseye of the issue, which is that a lot of those unmet needs are actually a function of something that's playing out in our lives that has never been resolved from our relationship with our parents. I'm not saying this in a psychological way. I know there's a lot of work on this in the domain of psychology, but I'm not working in that domain. I'm talking about this in terms of that that's the very first relationship that we have in our life with the people who are the source of our life. It's a very powerful model.

Andrew Poles:

Most of the messaging we get from the moment we can understand language comes at us from a paradigm of there's something wrong, something wrong with you, there's something wrong with the situation. What I love about what you said, Ron, is that it's all ways of communicating love and concern in a paradigm where there isn't anything wrong. Maybe something happened that doesn't work, but it's not the same thing as there's something wrong with you or with this.

Andrew Poles:

If parents can find a way to communicate with their children from a paradigm where there's nothing wrong and there are some times where things that just don't work, then kids can always feel whole and complete. They can feel perfect just the way they are and they can be equipped to cope with life and really be powerful in relationships. I think your message was a beautiful way of expressing that.

Ron Barshop:

He told me that his daughter is basically in a club of kids. He's joking with the word club. Their common language to get in the door is, "I hate my parents too."

Andrew Poles:

Yes. I didn't go through that with my daughter. I think it's fine for kids to go through that. But, I didn't go through that with my daughter. I think part of why I didn't go through that with my daughter is because of the messaging that you just said. I just want to say one more thing, Ron, I think is critical about this if I may time allowing. I think a lot of us grew up thinking that the way to be a parent is that we're supposed to know everything and have an answer for everything and have everything worked out and then give it to our kids. I think that's exactly wrong.

Andrew Poles:

The way that I raised my daughter was I was really vulnerable with her. I shared with her the places in my life where I was struggling or where I failed or like, "Hey, God. I just lied to somebody. I can't believe I did that. I got to go and clean this up. I'm so embarrassed, but I'm going to go do that because my word matters to me," really modeling for her what it looks like to be a human being is a big mess. That she knew it was okay to go through what she was going through and she would communicate to me honestly what she was going through. I think that's a really important message too that parents don't have it all figured out. We're not perfect. We're going through the same stuff they're going through. I think if parents can create that relationship, it's very powerful.

Ron Barshop:

Andrew, I took up tango dancing about 10 years ago and fell in love with it because just a subtle touch of the hand can direct my partner where she needs to go backwards in her high heels. It's almost like steering a tractor or steering a car, but it's a lot more elegant than a car when you're dancing the tango. You were a professional dancer and danced competitively for many years. Your subtle hand was the same thing. You can direct where you needed to go on the stage for that which wasn't unrehearsed. What can we do in our lives with our communication style to be that subtle hand to love on properly the people that are around us right now?

Andrew Poles:

I think the one thing people can do to be that subtle hand is to practice developing a sensitivity to what's going on with the listener versus being really, really focused on what you want to get said. There's a difference between trying to get something out and being focused on trying to get it in with the other person. You can get a lot of stuff out that never gets in and it doesn't make a difference. I would say that subtle hand in communication is have what you're going to say come from them, not you. That's what's going to make you a powerful partner.

Ron Barshop:

Give me an example of that, Andrew.

Andrew Poles:

I might be having a conversation with my wife about what she's dealing with, with her new job. What might be right there for me to want to get out is all my brilliant pearls of wisdom and my advice about how I think should handle it. But if I get really, really present to what's going on with her, what I might start to get present to is her experience of trepidation or maybe it's self doubt. Now I'm making all this up so I don't want to try to throw my wife under the bus here, but

I'm making this up. Let's say what's there for her as trepidation. Maybe the thing that there is to say is to say, "Honey, you got this."

Ron Barshop:

That's nice. Andrew, you and I we've talked many, many times before. I can't even count the number of times I said, "I wish I would've had a tape recorder while we're talking because there's so many pearls of wisdom out of your mouth." Guess what? We did that today. I got to record my brilliant friend Andrew Poles. Andrew, how can people find you if they want to reach you for Impact Speaking Labs?

Andrew Poles:

They can send me an email at andrew@impactspeakinglab.com or they can go to our website, impactspeakinglab.com and they can request a conversation with me that way and/or call me on my cell which the number is available on the website.

Ron Barshop:

I have to compliment you, Andrew. You're the first person when I asked my trick question at the end that nobody's ever prepared for, "If you can fly a banner over America," you gave such a good one last time and now I'm going to trick you again and say give me a great message we should be flying over America right now for everybody who is cooped up with each other.

Andrew Poles:

Be kind to yourself and your family.

Ron Barshop:

I got to tell you 99 out of 100 folks that are on this show give me about a 20-minute answer to that, which means that the banner would have to go on to Antarctica, Houston to Antarctica. There's not a banner for that long. But it's a trick question because it is hard to summarize. I think it was Mark Twain that said, "I would have written you a short letter. I didn't have time. So I wrote you this long one."

Andrew Poles:

Yes.

Ron Barshop:

Andrew, we didn't have time for our short interview because there's too much to talk about. We had to have this long one. Thank you again for being on the show. We'll look forward to getting you back again soon.

Andrew Poles:

Such an honor, Ron. Thank you so much. Ron, thank you for making this available for people. You're making an enormous difference.

Ron Barshop:

Thank you. Andrew Poles, communications expert and communication coach to the tens of thousands. Andrew, what can we do in our cooped upness to be better communicators?

Andrew Poles:

People are definitely going to find that social distancing from the people that are cooped up with will greatly improve their communication. I think people need space from each other physically and emotionally to kind of just reboot. If you can find a way to get some time away from each other and know that that's not only okay, but necessary, when you do come back together you'll have a lot more room to listen and talk with each other in a way that's productive.

Ron Barshop:

Thank you for listening. You want to shake things up? There's two things you can do for us. One, go to primarycarecures.com for show notes and links to our guests. Number two, help us spotlight what's working in primary care by listening on iTunes or wherever you get your podcasts and subscribing and leave us a review. It helps our megaphone more than you know. Until next episode.