

Primary Care Cures

Episode 105: Shiv Rao

Ron Barshop:

You know most problems in health care are fixed already. Primary care is already cured on the fringes, reversing burnout, physician shortages, bad business models, forced buyouts, factory medicine, high deductible insurance 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, deceleration of reimbursements. I want you to meet those in this show that are making a difference. With us, Ron Barshop, CEO of Beacon Clinics, that's me.

Ron Barshop:

Almost every leader of top 10 medical associations averaged 555,000 in payments from bigs over the last few years. Do you think that your leaders really truly work for your specialty? Do they represent you? Do they honor your profession or someone or something else? Because your association is owned by bigs. There's no exceptions. And let's honor the 20% of physician leaders that are not gaming the system and taking this kind of money. So, let me just read you an excerpt from The British Medical Journal. It found that 80% of 293 physician leaders from the top 10 most influential medical associations in the US, and I'm going to list them. It's the American College of Cardiology, our guest today is a member of that, the American College of Physicians, the American Psychiatric Association, Infectious Diseases Society of America, and on and on, the list goes on.

Ron Barshop:

So they received financial payments of 130 million in total for leadership quote unquote activities from 2017 to 2019. When I published this, I got a lot of feedback from academics that said this is how they make their living. And then I just have my question, if this is how you make your living and if you're disclosing that, that's wonderful. Are you making your academic living because of your position, is my big question. So, today we have as a guest, Shiv Rao. He is a cardio surgeon at UPMC and he was the EVP of their venture fund until a year ago. And he's now CEO of Abridge, which is an app that transcribes doctor visits for the consumer, finally. And I say finally, because there's so much focused on physicians or hospitals or the payment system, there's very little really designed for the patient themselves, for the consumer.

Ron Barshop:

But this is a very interesting algorithm that translates your conversation from symptoms into search engine, from conditions into search engine, from meds into search engine. So it literally converts your conversation into something you can use later, because you're probably a little bit shocked when you're having your doctor meeting, especially if it's a serious one. Well Shiv, welcome to the show.

Shiv Rao:

Thanks, Ron. It's great to be here with you.

Ron Barshop:

This is really sort of a revolutionary innovation. It's not something that most people play in that playing field because it doesn't seem to have a revenue stream naturally associated with it. There's not a doctor that's going to pay for it, there's not a system that's going to pay for it. You're going to get your revenue in a different way, aren't you?

Shiv Rao:

Absolutely. You led a bit with the American College of Cardiology, and I can give you a sense of where this all came from, if that makes sense.

Ron Barshop:

Sure.

Shiv Rao:

So in March of 2018, I left my cardiology practice to fully focus on building Abridge, because while I love being a doctor and I still see patients from time to time, I recognized then that this technology has the potential to help so many more people than I could ever see in my weekly clinic. What we're really about at Abridge, we're about two things. We help people better understand and better follow through on their care plans. And what we know that that creates is it creates more peace of mind for people.

Shiv Rao:

And over the last couple years, since we've been building this, we've gotten to the point where we're now helping over 50,000 people. And we've helped them over time, better understand over 400,000 medical terms, and we've helped them better understand over 54,000 conversation takeaways. So those are the parts with the next steps, like the take more aspirin, or the get this X-ray or this CT scan and see me in six months.

Shiv Rao:

So in terms of our model, our model is about aligning with the mission of the company. The mission really is our value. And we know that where the system has to go is it has to go towards a consumer centered system, where the incentives are truly aligned with long-term value, with health and wellness, instead of episodic sick care.

Ron Barshop:

You showed me a demonstration of this and the sources that you tie to when I do my deeper dive is like Mayo Clinic. Who are some of your other partners that you're tied to for the sources of the deeper dives?

Shiv Rao:

Yeah, absolutely. So when people record medical conversations with Abridge, we help them better understand those conversations by not just helping them re-listen to the key medical moments, we also layer on health literacy on top of those medical moments. So any jargon, for example, so if I were to see you in my clinic and I use the word unstable angina, maybe, I might

not think twice about it because I'm in a hurry and I have to go see my next patient. But what you'd be able to do is go back to the conversation and Abridge would define unstable angina for you at a human reading level.

Shiv Rao:

And in order to get access to that sort of trusted human reading level information, we partnered with people with entities like the Mayo Clinic. We also pull information from the National Library of Medicine, from the FDA and so on and so forth. But what's key in terms of the user experience is that information isn't at a PhD or MD level. We make sure to meet people where they are, where most of us are.

Ron Barshop:

The other thing interesting that I saw was that if you mentioned, for example, Lisinopril, and that came up, not only can I do a deeper dive into Lisinopril and learn more about how that's going to help my angina, but you also have a GoodRX coupon that's attached to that. And you're going to send me a reminder in two or three days, did you fill your script?

Shiv Rao:

Absolutely. And I think that storyline that you just totally aligned is consistent with the mission of the company. So you record the conversation and we'll pull up those medications, whether it's Metoprolol or Atorvastatin, and we'll help better understand what those actually do, but we'll help you understand what they do in the context of the conversation that you actually had with your clinician. So in a sentence, we're trying to position ourselves as an extension of the clinician's best intention for the consumer, to help them really be able to understand and grok and follow through on the care plan, to be the healthiest version of themselves.

Shiv Rao:

Because we know for sure, we all know that the most important part of the health journey actually happens between your encounters with the health system, whether it's at an urgent care or in a hospital or in a minute clinic or a primary care clinic, the most important part of the health journey is actually outside of those spaces. So if we can use technology to pull the next steps, the care plan from those conversations into your daily life, and if we can do it in a meaningful way, we're convinced that we can help people be healthier.

Ron Barshop:

The other thing I liked about it is that now when I go home to my wife and she says, "What happened?" And I mispronounce... How do you pronounce Lisinopril?

Shiv Rao:

Yeah, Lisinopril.

Ron Barshop:

Lisinopril.

Shiv Rao:

Exactly.

Ron Barshop:

If you mispronounce it like I did the first two, three times, now you can go home and your wife can say, "Well, what is it that he recommended?" And I can actually point to the conversation. Or I can actually send it to her, or I can send it to her and my mother, or send it to her and my mother and my girlfriend. I don't have a girlfriend, honey. But that was really a nice feature, is it can automatically send these digital conversations that have been recorded to the people that I love.

Shiv Rao:

Yeah, absolutely. And I think one of the main pain points that we're also addressing is that people want their team to be on the same page. That team could be family members, it could be care providers, care managers, it could be clinicians, but keeping everybody on the same page can be so difficult. You might get your care at an urgent care, you might use an app for a specific medication, you might go to the academic medical center for a procedure. And now all of a sudden you have any number of different portals to actually visit to connect the dots across your care and understand what actually happened.

Shiv Rao:

If you're using Abridge, then you have your entire story in one place. And when you want to keep that family member on the same page, when you want to share with them, it's as easy as any other experience in a consumer app. And that pain point that you mentioned around keeping people on the same page is more pronounced now, I think, than ever before. We've heard from people who can't attend their partner's chemotherapy sessions because they're not allowed inside the building, and so they're stuck in the parking lot, rooting them on. And being able to use Abridge as the person in the center of the journey and seamlessly keep that family member on the same page now is so important.

Ron Barshop:

And another feature that I really liked was you can now record virtual calls and virtual meetings with a new feature that you have with Abridge. So if I have a virtual primary care visit or a virtual specialty visit, or if I have a Zoom call, you can now record that same conversation as part of your features of your app too. Is that here yet? Or is that coming?

Shiv Rao:

It is here. And what it means for the consumer is that if you're seeing a doctor and your partner, your care team member can't be there in person with you, you can use a service called 1-877-ABRIDGE. As long as you're a registered user of Abridge, you can use that number to dial in that family member, that care team member into the clinic visit. So they can be there, they can partake in the conversation and they can hear it live. But when you hang up that call, everyone has a copy of that summary that they can access and that you control since you're the main character.

Ron Barshop:

That's kind of sexy because if I'm a doctor, I can now have this app used for all of my visits, and now they can send that to the patient. Obviously there's no HIPAA issues by sending that to the patient. There might be HIPAA issues by sending it to the people they love.

Shiv Rao:

Yeah, it's interesting. So the HIPAA piece is really invoked when you're building something that's centered more on the system, centered on the provider, or if you're building something for a payer. But given our stance of really focusing on the consumer, if anything, HIPAA is on our side. HIPAA is something that's really about helping consumers get access to their medical data. And that's obviously part and parcel with the mission of the company.

Shiv Rao:

So you also got at telemedicine, and it's the same story, where our technology can create summaries from those conversations as well. And those summaries now can help the consumer, help better understand and follow through. But we're also convinced now that those summaries can also help clinicians. It can help them stay on the same page, it can help them save time and it can help them... I think the very act of recording and creating these summaries actually bolsters trust.

Ron Barshop:

We have thousands of listeners to this show who are physicians, some who are executives, some who are probably employers, but everybody listening to this show is a patient. Everybody listening to this show is a consumer. And when you and I visited, the thing that struck me was you did not address them as patients, you talked to them as consumers. What is your attitude about consumers versus patients?

Shiv Rao:

I think there's a lot of power in that word. And so much of the mission of this company is about shifting agency to people, and away from a system that over time has obfuscated and worked against things like transparency. Now, things are changing now, and there's a lot of tailwinds in the air, whether it's the information blocking rule or it's the APIs that are going to be exposed for consumers to invoke to aggregate their data from medical records or from payers in 2021. But those tailwinds are really all about giving the actual end user, the individual in healthcare, giving them more agency and more control.

Ron Barshop:

Well, you're not changing the current system. You're changing the way of thinking about the current system is what you're doing with this technology. You told me there was something like 15% of people are already recording their doctor visits today. That was an astounding number.

Shiv Rao:

Yeah, it's really interesting. There was an article in The New York Times a couple years ago that reflected on research out of Dartmouth that suggested that up to 15% of people out there have

ever recorded a conversation with their clinician. From my own personal experience as a doctor, I can remember those instances, where you could tell something maybe someone wanted to record or already was recording the conversation. And what we're trying to do is make that behavior safe and a value add for everyone involved.

Shiv Rao:

Because if you record the conversation using Abridge, you're getting so much more than just the audio that you would get from using your iPhone recorder. All that marginal value is in how we can pull out the medical moments. We can help you better understand the medical terminology and how we can help you better follow through on the next steps, so that you can be healthy, so that you can optimize your own life and stay on top of your health. So what we're trying to do is create an incentive for those conversations to be in the open, for everyone to be on the same page about them, because everyone can benefit from them.

Ron Barshop:

So everybody listening to this interview can download Abridge, how? I guess the typical app store solutions?

Shiv Rao:

Yeah, exactly. You just go to the app store, look up Abridge, download it. And give it a first trial recording, press record and say a couple medical terms or medications or diagnoses or procedures, and then see how well it does for you.

Ron Barshop:

Yeah. And it's free. And then if you're a system or you're a doctor and you want to do the same thing, it's no different.

Shiv Rao:

Yeah, absolutely. And if you're a system and you're a doctor or a part of a practice, we'd love to also speak with you about what we're creating on that clinician side. I think what's a little bit different about us versus other companies that might be building solutions for clinicians is that we also see them as consumers. And that means we're optimizing for a user experience we think that just hasn't existed in healthcare. Our thesis, I think that underpins a lot of the technology that we've built over the last few years, is that healthcare is actually about stories.

Shiv Rao:

And upstream of all the diagnostics, whether it's a chest X-ray or a CT scan, whether it's a baby aspirin or an immunotherapy, upstream of all that care is a conversation. And in that conversation, we as consumers, as people, we're telling the story of our symptoms, the story of our families. Clinicians are writing histories and physicals. Where we're different is that we're flipping the script to make sure that it's about the consumer, the person, at the end of the day, that it's really centered on them.

Shiv Rao:

But we also recognize that it takes two to create that healthcare narrative. So much of the value that we're creating is on top of the clinician's words, we're trying to be that extension of their best intention to help their patient. And so it would make sense for us to also want to surface these summaries to them, to help them improve the quality of their conversations and help them save time. And so for all the clinicians or providers or practices out there, we'd love to show them what we've got for them as well and how they can help their patients and also themselves in their practices.

Ron Barshop:

So this is an intuitive idea that everybody listening to says, "I wish I would have thought of that one. Should have thought of that one." And what do you say to physicians like you, you've been involved with the venture side of things for UPMC. What do you say to physicians who think they have a great idea, but don't know how to first step to pursue it? What would you say to somebody like that?

Shiv Rao:

I would say that there are so many ways to pursue ideas and now more than ever is the time to pursue ideas that really are centered on helping patients, because we have every tailwind now to get at that. That's absolutely where the puck is going. And the only way, I think, as a system, that we're going to get to deflationary economics is to actually have clinicians, I think, be a part of teams, multidisciplinary teams that are connecting all the dots across all the different aspects of a solution that you need from the technology, to the design, to the public health aspects and be a part of these teams that can create these experiences. So yeah, I would encourage them that now's the time, more than ever.

Ron Barshop:

So Shiv, how do people find you if they're looking to reach out to you?

Shiv Rao:

They can email me direct. My email is Shiv S-H-I-V @abridge.com.

Ron Barshop:

Easy to spell. Okay, and then if you could fly a banner over America with one single message, what would that banner say?

Shiv Rao:

That's a great question. I would say people centered healthcare is where... And people centered design is where it's at and that's where we need to go.

Ron Barshop:

Boy is that understated. Thank you for saying that. People are not talking enough about people centricity and I appreciate that. Thank you, Shiv, and we'll get you on the show and you can do a checkup. So you're at 60,000 members now or 60,000 have downloaded your app. And what do you think this is going to look like a year from now?

Shiv Rao:

I think as we spread the word about the value, not just for the consumer, but also for the clinician, we hope that this grows and becomes a mainstream behavior across the country. The technology that we've built can ride shotgun for everyone out there, for all their medical conversations, whether they're happening in person, or if they're happening at home via telemedicine. And our ultimate ambition is to really have people's back across their entire health journey to help them be healthy. So we hope that number is some multiple higher than this next year.

Ron Barshop:

Okay, great. All right. Well, thanks for your time and we'll look forward to following up with you.

Shiv Rao:

Awesome. Thanks, Ron.

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. And number two, help us spotlight what's working in primary care by listening on iTunes or wherever you get your podcast and subscribing and leave us a review. It helps our megaphone more than you know. Until next episode.