What’s trending in 2019?

As part of one of Iowa’s largest medical centers, Mercy’s thought leaders are often asked by the media to comment on the latest news and events. Editors at the Des Moines Business Record recently requested Mercy President Karl Keeler provide his thoughts on health care industry trends to watch in 2019. The following guest column appears in the Friday, Jan. 4, issue of the publication.

Today’s patients are smart, driven and tech-savvy consumers, with the means to shop for quality care, delivered at an affordable price. The convenience of accessing what they want, when and how they want it, is an expectation rooted in retail experiences from customer service giants like Google and Amazon. Our industry is following suit to meet the commanding needs of Millennials, and the Gen Xers who will follow.

Change is no stranger to health care. Systems and providers continue to be resilient, managing consumer expectations and delivering new approaches to care, while navigating local, state and federal-level challenges. Government and third-party reimbursement for health care in Iowa is among the lowest in the country and region and will remain inadequate without added pressure placed on programs like Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security.

As inpatient numbers drop and outpatient visits rise, revenue trends for health care providers fluctuate. Nonetheless, Mercy and fellow non-profit providers have not abandoned the uninsured and underserved. During fiscal year 2018, Mercy provided the equivalent of $53.5 million in community benefit. Collectively, health care providers remain diligent in managing costs within our control, while seeking legislative assistance to address volatile pharmaceutical, medical implant and technology pricing.

To interest and best serve today’s consumer, health care organizations must be bold. This translates into a commitment of developing personalized health services that are radically convenient, like those offered at the Mercy Lung Cancer Clinic. A national Screening Center of Excellence, the clinic provides low-dose CT imaging screening to detect lung cancers. If discovered, the patient has access to a multidisciplinary team of specialists, who develop a personalized care plan in one location, in the same day. If surgery is required, a state-of-the-art surgical robot removes the cancer through a minimally invasive procedure.

To be successful, health systems must innovate and embrace technologies to increase convenience, maintain quality and lower costs.
Mercy and Iowa Heart Center earn distinguished three-star rating

Mercy Medical Center –Des Moines and Iowa Heart Center have earned a distinguished three-star rating from The Society of Thoracic Surgeons (STS) for their patient care and outcomes in isolated aortic valve replacement (AVR) surgery. The three-star rating, which denotes the highest category of quality, places Mercy’s Iowa Heart Center among the elite for AVR surgery in the United States and Canada.

The STS star rating system is one of the most sophisticated and highly regarded overall measures of quality in health care, rating the benchmarked outcomes of cardiothoracic surgery programs in the United States and Canada. The star rating is calculated using a combination of quality measures for specific procedures performed by an STS Adult Cardiac Surgery Database participant.

“We are honored to be recognized as being in the top three percent of hospitals in the nation for excellence in aortic valve replacement,” said David Hockmuth, M.D., cardiothoracic surgeon and medical director of cardiothoracic surgery at Mercy and Iowa Heart Center. “This is really a testament not only to the surgeons and advanced practice clinicians’ hard work, but also to the strong communication and teamwork across multiple hospital departments that take care of these patients and administrative support to provide this great service to fellow Iowans near and far.”

Historically, approximately four to eight percent of participants receive the three-star rating for isolated AVR surgery. The latest analysis of data for AVR surgery covers a three-year period, from July 2015 to June 2018.

Honor Martin Luther King by feeding the homeless

Monday, Jan. 21, marks the 33rd national Day of Service to continue the work of Martin Luther King Jr. Mercy colleagues can do this by making casseroles, or providing additional foods, to help the Salvation Army feed the homeless.

Pans and recipes will be available on Wednesday, Jan. 16, from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Market Place and Grille on central campus and The Café at Mercy West Lakes. Casseroles and additional food items can be dropped off on Monday, Jan. 21, from 6:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the main entrance valet at Mercy’s central campus or at the lower parking deck at Mercy – West Lakes.

For more information, contact Jacquie Easley McGhee at 643-8238.
By the time Christa Yanqui was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS) at the end of July 2015, the then 29-year-old had spent six months getting progressively more worried about the strange numbness she had been feeling.

“It started with just my toes and my feet but the area of numbness kept growing,” she says. She visited several doctors and the emergency room of her local hospital in Newton, Iowa, for numbness that extended all the way up to her torso. “I had no sensation in that part of my body,” she says. “I could walk, but I couldn’t feel anything. I was really scared and I really needed someone to figure out what was happening to me.”

That ER visit led to a referral to Mercy Ruan Neurology (which has the largest MS patient base in the state of Iowa and treats more than 2,000 MS patients), where she underwent a series of tests including MRIs and a spinal tap. After her diagnosis, she was referred to neurologist Bruce Hughes, M.D., who specializes in treating people with MS.

Her first meeting with Valerie Stickel-Diehl, a nurse and MS advocate in Dr. Hughes’ office, was the start of Christa’s healing journey.

“I was so worried about everything that I was in tears. She said, ‘Honey, have a seat. It’ll be okay, let me talk to you,’” Christa says.

Valerie reassured Christa she would be all right – that the diagnosis wasn’t as scary as she feared, that medications were available, and that Dr. Hughes was very good at his job. “I think she spent a whole hour talking with me at that first appointment,” Christa says with gratitude. “She is such a kind person.”

Dr. Hughes has been with the clinic from its beginning in 1995. He serves as the medical director of the Neuroscience Center and is a member of the Board of Trustees with the Upper Midwest Chapter of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society.

The care Christa has received from Dr. Hughes has been equally compassionate—one of the reasons she always recommends him and Mercy Ruan Neurology whenever a friend might need to see a neurologist.

“He’s just a really good doctor,” she says. “He listens, he’s very comforting and he never acts like he’s too busy to listen or answer questions. I feel that he really cares. When I email the office with a question, Valerie always gets back to me within a day, and checks with Dr. Hughes if needed. I’ve never had that kind of communication with a doctor’s office before, and it helps so much to be able to get answers to my questions in between appointments.”

Dr. Hughes tried two different medications for Christa’s relapsing-remitting MS before starting her on Tysabri, which she receives via IV once a month. Her MRIs show no new brain lesions and she feels great—well enough to continue working as a corrections officer at the Iowa Correctional Institute for Women in Mitchellville, work in her garden and practice yoga. She also credits her switch to a vegan diet with helping her energy level.

“I believe in having a positive attitude and living my life regardless of this disease,” she says. “I don’t feel sorry for myself. I’ve had several friends who have known someone who has symptoms like mine, or a diagnosis of MS, and I’m always happy to talk with them about it. I want to help them the way Valerie and Dr. Hughes have helped me.”