

A photograph of two men in business suits standing on a balcony. The man on the left is wearing a dark suit, glasses, and a patterned tie. The man on the right is wearing a grey suit and a red tie. They are both smiling slightly. The background shows a city street with cars and buildings.

HEALTHCARE HEROES

Improving healthcare with an unlikely super power: **data**

by Natalie Bruckner

Photos: Sue Holland/iStock

MICHAEL CAESAR, MBA '01, AND KEVIN FENG, MGB '14, never intended to make a career for themselves in the healthcare data analytics realm. In fact, while studying at Gustavson, they had very different expectations of where they would end up. “A musician, perhaps?” suggests Feng, laughing. And yet, with data analytics among the fastest growing industries in the tech world right now (estimated to be worth around \$1.45 billion in Canada today), and the healthcare industry booming, it was a wise, if unexpected, career path.

Today, Caesar, Executive Director, Data and Implementation Science at the University Health Network (UHN), and Feng, former Functional Manager, Analytics Operations Lead at Cancer Care Ontario, are impacting the future of healthcare by working on enhanced data that will lead to insightful action.

Caesar, a veteran in the field with 18 years' experience, leads a team of experts in both change management and analytics on a variety of projects to help improve patient outcomes, health system costs and access to care. Feng, who has five years' experience in the sector (two of which were with Caesar at UHN), was recently working on a project to find long-term solutions to help those with mental health and addiction issues.

The experiences of these two alumni offer a glimpse into what it takes to work—and thrive—in this sector, for everyone from established professionals looking for fresh ideas about continued growth to recent grads curious about transitioning into healthcare administration and analytics.

- **2001**
Graduated from UVic with MBA
- **2008**
Awarded 3M Health Care Quality Team Award from the Canadian College of Health Leaders (CCHL)
For leading the development of one of the first healthcare focused processes improvement teams based on the Toyota Production System and GE improvement approaches (LEAN & Six Sigma) to help improve Emergency Department access to care in Ontario.
- **2009-2016**
Received multiple national and international team awards for change management, process improvement, project management and innovation — including Canada's prestigious **Ingenious Award in 2016**.
- **2015**
Awarded Project Excellence Award (North America) from the Project Management Institute (PMI)
For leading the improvement of clinical documentation and data capture across the hospital.
- **2017**
Awarded 3M Health Care Quality Team Award for a second time from the Canadian College of Health Leaders (CCHL)
- **2018**
Awarded Project Excellence Award (North America) for a second time from the Project Management Institute (PMI)
For leading the transformation of internal hospital discharge processes, improving transitions of care from hospital to the community through improved clinical data capture, timelines of data access and quality of documentation.

MICHAEL CAESAR

Leading the Charge for Change

Navigating a leadership career from MBA to award-winning healthcare executive

Q How did you become involved in healthcare data analytics?

I honestly thought I would end up in a completely different industry, but when I came out of the MBA with a specialization in service management, it opened my eyes to a larger potential to get involved. My father was a physician so I was exposed to the healthcare environment from an early age, and that struck a chord in me. Straight out of my MBA, I was recruited as a senior analyst in Toronto before moving into change management at University Health Network (UHN). I would often spend the day with care providers and that hands-on experience helped me understand the complexities involved in the healthcare realm as I transitioned from project manager to executive director.

Q How did your MBA prepare you for this career?

I was fortunate enough to be one of the first cohorts through the MBA service management specialization at UVic and this program has been invaluable to my journey in healthcare. The program is structured around teamwork, and healthcare is a team industry. The MBA teaches you to be adaptable, which is essential due to the sheer complexity of the healthcare environment.

Q What is an indicator of an award-winning or highly functioning team?

I've had the incredible opportunity to be part of teams that have won local, national and international awards. These awards include being recognized for business transformation, change management, project management and innovation. One of the most important characteristics of an award-winning team is the collective desire to seek genuine, impactful improvements for the organization. I see this come to life in a team's willingness and courage to pull apart and put back together ideas, to put historical paradigms aside and grab a whiteboard



marker and walk through new ways of thinking, to be able to show the organization, with data and passion, where "better" lives. It's one part a way of working and one part a deep desire for improvement.

Q How do you create such a team?

Good question. I'm not sure it is such a simple answer. Every team is different, working on different problems and bringing different skills to the table—every single time. There are a few things that I think are important in positioning a team properly, however. First, it's about goals: clarity in purpose and a direct link between purpose and the team is essential. Helping the team remain laser focused on those goals, surfacing data that support those goals and helping the organization learn about those goals is essential. Second, it's about setting up an environment for the team to debate, discuss and sometimes, yes, argue. These are all incredibly important traits for a team. If they aren't debating and challenging each other then they aren't learning together and dealing with core, impactful issues and solutions. With clarity of goals and passion they can do anything. Lastly, a team needs support from a leader who knows there are going to be twists and turns, ups and downs, and create an environment that knows when to protect the team and when to challenge them. ■

Photos: Sue Holland; iStock

KEVIN FENG

Answering Opportunity's Knock

International business grad takes on healthcare data analytics

Q How did you become involved in healthcare data analytics?

It really wasn't intentional! When I was a student, I started working part-time as a clerk in the ER at UHN. You learn a lot about the nitty gritty when you work night shift and weekends in ER. I was there for two years while I finished off my undergrad, and the summer between graduating and starting the Master of Global Business program at UVic, a project analyst position became available where I supported a major project to procure an enterprise hospital information system.

Q Would you say your career path has been organic or structured?

My mother was in healthcare, so I come from a lineage of healthcare—and apparently the apple doesn't fall far from the tree—but I never expected to transition into data analytics. I started out with a business angle as a business analyst at Cancer Care Ontario, but found the analytics component a lot more interesting. It was so foreign to me and was an opportunity to learn. I enjoy doing things that are outside my comfort zone. I then took a job as a senior business analyst before becoming a functional manager, analytics operations lead. Five years ago, I would never have imagined I would be working with a team that delivers high-quality analytic services to drive policy-making decisions, that's for sure.

Q How did an international business education prepare you for your role?

To work in data analytics, and in particular healthcare, it takes a certain element of entrepreneurship. It's a relatively niche career, and you need to be able to take charge. Networking is essential, and a little risk taking is involved, too. The MGB gave me great foundations for all of this. It pushes you into unfamiliar environments with people from all walks of life, so you learn how to quickly adapt. The health system has a lot of moving parts, so this skill is essential.



Q What exciting projects are you involved in currently?

I am working with four hospitals that provide specialized mental health data on mental health and addiction. It's a private project that is planned to be scaled out to all mental health units and programs in the province. We are looking at not just patient access in the hospital but also what happens once they are discharged. How do we not lose patients in the gaps of the system? How can we ensure the continuity of care is available in the community? The project is trying to address that gap by unifying data so we can speak the same language and use that data to positively effect change.

Q What advice would you give recent grads looking to get a foot in the door?

I feel lucky that I had the experience in ER as I got to see the realities of the frontline and feel I can now bring this into my role. However, having that experience isn't essential. It's more about being open-minded and recognizing opportunities. I was a business analyst with a business degree and somehow ended up in healthcare data, so don't rule anything out. I think most people want to try to do something that will make a difference and save a life, and healthcare provides a great chance to do this. ■

• **2010-2012**
ER Ward Clerk

Gained hands-on experience of hospital operations that would later help him become a better, more knowledgeable, advocate for hospital stakeholders.

• **2014**
Graduated from UVic with MGB

30 master's students from five international schools studied in Victoria, Taiwan and Austria over the course of a year.

• **2013-2015**
Business Analyst at Cancer Care Ontario, Access to Care

Provided business support and program governance to ensure operational success.

• **2015-2016**
Senior Business Analyst at Cancer Care Ontario, Access to Care

Lead business contact responsible for the delivery of analytic products used to inform health system decisions across Ontario's ER sector.

• **2016-Fall 2018**
Functional Manager, Analytics Operations Lead

Developed the business infrastructure and team competencies that deliver high-quality analytic services to drive decision making, policy and planning for the Ontario health system.

• **2017**
Analytics Hackathon program design

"The Analytics Hackathon is the first of its kind at Cancer Care Ontario, and the accomplishment I am most proud of to date. It sets the stage for new insights and analytics to drive innovative health system change."

• **2018**
Data Governance Lead

In fall 2018, Feng started a new adventure as Data Governance Lead with Ontario Telemedicine Network.