Dear friends,

The Upstreamist

Six years ago, I called for the training of a new generation of professionals who are equipped with the skills to address social drivers of health and equity at all levels — from individual social needs and structural determinants of health to the complex causes affecting upstream care. These professionals, known as Upstreamists, are dedicated to improving the lives of patients and communities by redesigning care and improving health outcomes through upstream investments. The Upstreamist vision is to transform the field of complex care, putting care at the center of every decision.

With so many emerging initiatives and projects to address social determinants of health, the opportunity to improve the lives of patients and communities is more real than ever. But we face a real risk of squandering this opportunity. We need a whole fleet of “dedicated professionals who redesign care and improve the health of people and communities” by improving health policy and structural determinants of health across America.

As a field, we’re accustomed to working like a strong and nimble tugboat in this work, and we will continue to do so. However, we’re also well into the new era of systems-thinking. Here it is:

Calls to train Upstreamists are coming from all directions — from the WHO, who calls the “the causes of the causes.” The Upstream Doctors movement. Here it is:

The American Hospital Association now has a social-justice platform and the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine released a report outlining why it’s time to view upstream interventions as investments for long-term financial, health, and social impact.

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