



# GUIDE TO CAREERS *in* HEALTH CARE CONSULTING

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# INTRODUCTION

In the past five years, the demand for health care consultants has increased due to the growing complexities in health care and the need for specialty services to meet them. With an aging population of baby boomers, an increase in chronic diseases, growing access to health care services, an increasingly complex regulatory environment, and new technologies and innovations, health care organizations are looking for partners to help them navigate the changes they face.

In 2008, researchers at the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) described the goals of addressing such needs as the “Triple Aim” of health care: simultaneously “improving the individual experience of care; improving the health of populations; and reducing the per capita costs of care for populations.”<sup>1</sup> In 2010, the Triple Aim became part of the U.S. national strategy for addressing health care issues, especially in terms of the implementation of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) of 2010.<sup>2</sup> Meeting the Triple Aim is a tall task for health care organizations, and they are increasingly looking to health care consultants for the expertise to help them achieve it. A career as a health care consultant can be challenging, highly satisfying and potentially lucrative since the industry outlook is bright and the salary for a management consultant in the United States averages over \$131,000 annually.<sup>3</sup>

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The revenue in this industry is expected to increase annually 5.1 percent, hitting \$14.9 billion in 2020, largely due to new patients. In 2016, revenue is expected to increase 4.8 percent.<sup>4</sup> In addition, health care consulting is increasingly a global affair, with one research firm estimating a yearly global market growth of 7 percent in this sector.<sup>5</sup> Many consulting firms that are based in the United States have offices throughout the world.

If you are considering a career in this field, you will maximize your efforts by knowing what to expect, whether you are well-suited for the role and how to embark on such an endeavor. Although independent consulting work may sound attractive, it can be very difficult for recent graduates or those without extensive experience in the field to secure work. The aim of this guide is to provide an in-depth understanding of a career as a health care consultant within niche health care consulting firms or general consulting firms that house major health care divisions. In order to do that, we will delve into a variety of related topics. We will begin by examining the basics of a career in health care consulting.

THROUGH 2020,  
*the revenue in this industry is expected to*  
INCREASE TO \$14.9 BILLION.

# THE BASICS

## What is health care consulting, and what types of firms provide it?

Health care consultants are individual professionals or firms that provide specialist advice to businesses involved in the health care field such as hospitals, physicians, pharmaceutical and medical device companies, and insurance providers. Such advice is typically related to financial management, human resources, information technology and other operations in order to meet some aspect of the Triple Aim. As the economy improves and the industry undergoes change and consolidation while it works to implement the ACA, the need for health care consultants is growing. That demand has made entry into the market more enticing in recent years.

There are basically two types of firms that provide health care consulting services: independent firms that focus exclusively on health care and general firms that house health care divisions. Although specialty health care consulting firms are still well-established in the market, their numbers have declined somewhat in the last half-decade. This is due to the fact that general consulting firms have acquired many of them to gain entrance into niche health care markets. This trend is expected to continue over the next five years as bigger firms continue to gain market share and expand the breadth of specialty services offered.<sup>6</sup>

## Who uses health care consultants?

**Hospitals** create the majority of demand at 38.4 percent of the current market. This is because of a variety of factors, including the need to adjust to changing regulations required by ACA, new technologies and requirements for electronic health records (EHR) implementation, and strategic planning for mergers and acquisitions in response to changes within the economic environment of the health care industry.

**Pharmaceutical firms** are major clients of healthcare consultants, making up 28.9 percent of the market for 2015. As the most profitable market segment, these clients make use of expertise in areas related to logistics, human resources, public relations and strategic management.

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**As the economy improves and the industry undergoes change and consolidation while it works to implement the ACA, the need for health care consultants is growing.**

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**Other health care providers**, including physicians' offices, diagnostic and medical laboratories, and outpatient centers, are estimated to account for 19.5 percent of the 2015 market share. Typical areas of expertise needed here involve financial management and methods to reduce supply costs, as well as the purchase, implementation and maintenance of EHR systems in physicians' offices.

**Government clients** are on the rise due to the increase in government expenditures related to the ACA, as well as the expected rapid acceleration in Medicare spending over the next five years as baby boomers begin to retire. Costs will need to be held at bay, and consultants are being called upon to help do it.

**Medical device companies** are using consultants to support both cost-effectiveness and innovation in research efforts, product development, safety issues and an increasingly complex regulatory structure – all while addressing a growing range of constituents and emerging markets.

**Insurance companies** rely on consultants to identify products that will help motivate consumers to use health services in the best manner, build member relationships and give providers the most effective care management tools and systems for reimbursement.

**Other clients** include nonprofits and various industries related to health care.<sup>7</sup>

## What type of work does a health care consultant do?

**Strategic management** generates the majority of the revenue in the health care consulting industry, at 36.8 percent in 2015. This field typically involves advising organizations on their overall strategic direction, including mergers or acquisitions related to Accountable Care Organizations (ACOs) and expanded medical communities, as well as facilities planning and governance procedures, especially ones related to ACA.

**Financial management and operations** provides the second-highest amount of revenue, at 18.9 percent. Needed expertise in this area relates to asset management, accounting procedures, budgetary controls, capital investments, price negotiations with various vendors, claims process analysis and the cost-effectiveness of treatments and services.

**Human resources and benefits** make up an estimated 12.9 percent of the market. Here, health care consultants provide expert advice regarding recruitment and retention strategies, labor-management relations, and employee training and development. They also design compensation and benefits packages.

**IT strategy** currently holds an estimated 9.3 percent of market share, though this will likely continue to increase in coming years. Within these services, clients are looking for support related to EHR implementation requirements, the conversion to cloud services, the integration of software-supported medical devices used in patient care and business analytics.

**Other services** include a variety of offerings, such as physician practice management, marketing, equipment planning and clinical support services.<sup>8</sup>

## What kind of educational background is needed?

The required educational background depends on the position candidates are applying for and what work experience they have. Most of the larger consulting firms will fill entry-level positions with those who have just completed their undergraduate degrees – so in these cases, only a bachelor's degree is required. However, firms will sometimes offer the same position to someone with a graduate degree who has minimal or no work experience. For more senior positions, a graduate degree of some type and work experience are required.

Although there are no specific requirements regarding licensure or certification to be a health care consultant, credentials certainly help when you are applying for a position. Two organizations that offer consulting certifications are the [National Society of Certified Healthcare Business Consultants](#), which is the largest trade association in the United States for health care business consultants, and the [Institute of Management Consultants](#). Certification provides clients with the assurance that consulting professionals are able to practice according to specific and accepted standards within the industry.

## Which are the top 10 firms?

Ranking the top firms depends upon whom you ask and what methodology is used to arrive at the results. [Vault Ranks & Reviews](#) asks consultants themselves to rank the best firms in health care consulting, and it provides a comprehensive overview of each company, including pros, cons and why you might be interested in working there. Here are the results for the top 10 firms for 2016:<sup>9</sup>

### 1. McKinsey & Company

**HEADQUARTERS:** New York, New York

**EMPLOYER TYPE:** Private

**2015 EMPLOYEES:** 20,500

**MAJOR OFFICE LOCATIONS:** 105 offices in more than 60 countries

#### Functional Practice Areas:

- Business technology
- Corporate finance
- Marketing and sales
- Operations
- Organization
- Risk
- Strategy
- Sustainability and resource productivity

#### Health Care Industry Practice Areas:

- Health care systems and services
- Pharmaceuticals and medical products

## 2. Deloitte Consulting LLP

**HEADQUARTERS:** New York, New York

**EMPLOYER TYPE:** Private

**2014 EMPLOYEES:** 29,000

**MAJOR OFFICE LOCATIONS:** More than 65 locations, including India and Mexico

### Functional Practice Areas:

- Human capital
- Strategy and operations
- Technology

### Health Care Industry Practice Areas:

- Life sciences
- Health care

## 3. The Boston Consulting Group, Inc.

**HEADQUARTERS:** Boston, Massachusetts

**EMPLOYER TYPE:** Private

**2015 EMPLOYEES:** 10,500

**MAJOR OFFICE LOCATIONS:** 82 offices in 46 countries

### Functional Practice Areas:

- Corporate development
- Corporate finance
- Globalization
- Information technology
- Innovation
- Marketing and sales
- Operations
- Risk management
- Strategy

### Health Care Industry Practice Areas:

- Biopharmaceuticals
- Health care payers and providers
- Medical devices and technology

## 4. Accenture

**HEADQUARTERS:** New York, New York

**EMPLOYER TYPE:** Public

**2015 EMPLOYEES:** 336,000

**MAJOR OFFICE LOCATIONS:** In more than 200 cities in 56 countries

### Functional Practice Areas (Accenture Consulting):

- Communications
- Media and technology
- Health and public service
- Products
- Resources

### Health Care Industry Practice Areas:

- Health administration services
- Clinical services
- Health management services



## 5. Bain & Company

**HEADQUARTERS:** Boston, Massachusetts

**EMPLOYER TYPE:** Private

**2015 EMPLOYEES:** 6,000

**MAJOR OFFICE LOCATIONS:** 53 offices in 34 countries

### Functional Practice Areas Include:

- Advanced analytics
- Digital
- Customer strategy and marketing
- Information technology
- Mergers and acquisitions
- Performance improvement
- Strategy
- Transformation

### Health Care Industry Practice Areas:

- Variety of health care industry needs

## 6. PricewaterhouseCoopers Advisory Services LLC

**HEADQUARTERS:** New York, New York

**EMPLOYER TYPE:** Private

**2015 EMPLOYEES:** 40,000

**MAJOR OFFICE LOCATIONS:** 83 offices in the United States and in 157 countries

### Functional Practice Areas:

- Strategy
- Management
- Technology
- Risk management

### Health Care Industry Practice Areas:

- Variety of health care industry needs

## 7. The Advisory Board Company

**HEADQUARTERS:** Washington, D.C.

**EMPLOYER TYPE:** Public

**2015 EMPLOYEES:** 2,800

**MAJOR OFFICE LOCATIONS:**

- Washington, D.C.
- Austin
- Birmingham
- Chicago
- Nashville
- Richmond
- Philadelphia
- San Francisco
- Chennai, India
- London

### Functional Practice Areas:

- Consulting
- Research
- Solutions
- Talent development
- Technology

### Health Care Industry Practice Areas:

- Variety of health care industry needs

## 8. ZS Associates

**HEADQUARTERS:** Evanston, Illinois

**EMPLOYER TYPE:** Private

**2015 EMPLOYEES:** 3,450

**MAJOR OFFICE LOCATIONS:**

- Boston
- Chicago
- Los Angeles
- New York
- Philadelphia
- Princeton
- San Diego
- San Francisco
- International offices in 12 countries

### Functional Practice Areas:

- Sales
- Marketing
- Operations

### Health Care Industry Practice Areas (make up 90 percent of client base):

- Pharmaceuticals
- Biotechnology
- Medical products
- Medical services

## 9. Huron Consulting Group

**HEADQUARTERS:** Chicago, Illinois

**EMPLOYER TYPE:** Public

**2015 EMPLOYEES:** 2,870

**MAJOR OFFICE LOCATIONS:**

- Atlanta
- Boston
- Charlotte
- Houston
- Morrisville, North Carolina
- New York
- Portland
- San Francisco
- Washington, D.C.
- London
- New Delhi

**Functional Practice Areas:**

- Financial management
- Strategy
- Operational and organizational effectiveness
- Research administration
- Regulatory compliance

**Health Care Industry Practice Areas:**

- Hospitals
- Health systems
- Physicians
- Managed care organizations
- Academic medical centers
- Colleges and universities
- Pharmaceutical companies
- Medical device manufacturers

## 10. Navigant Consulting, Inc.

**HEADQUARTERS:** Chicago, Illinois

**EMPLOYER TYPE:** Public

**2015 EMPLOYEES:** 5,000

**MAJOR OFFICE LOCATIONS:**

- 50 cities in North America
- Europe
- Middle East
- Asia

**Functional Practice Areas Include:**

- Strategy
- Finance
- Operations
- Technology
- Risk management
- Compliance
- Dispute resolution
- Business process management

**Health Care Industry Areas:**

- Health systems
- Physician practice groups
- Payers
- Life sciences companies

## How much money can I expect to make?

The salary for health care consultants is influenced by a number of factors that include experience, credentials, the size of the firm, its reputation, its history with the client and the scope of a particular project. Although industry complexity may play a role, individual salary is regulated within most firms predominantly by the individual's position, performance and tenure.

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**The 2015 national median salary for management consultants was \$131,613.**

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The total compensation package also makes a difference. In addition to base salary, many companies offer signing bonuses, compensation for relocation expenses, performance bonuses, retirement plans, tuition reimbursement and various amounts of paid vacation. The 2015 national median salary for management consultants was \$131,613.<sup>10</sup> The following provides a snapshot of graduate-level salaries for five of the top 10 companies mentioned previously:



## McKinsey & Company

**SIGNING BONUS:** \$25,000  
**BASE SALARY:** \$140,000  
**RELOCATION:** \$2,000-\$9,000 depending on distance  
**PERFORMANCE BONUS:** Up to \$35,000  
**TOTAL COMPENSATION:** Up to \$209,000

## Deloitte Consulting LLP

**SIGNING BONUS:** \$35,000  
**BASE SALARY:** \$140,000  
**RELOCATION:** Up to \$2,000  
**PERFORMANCE BONUS:** Up to \$35,000 (25 percent of base)  
**TOTAL COMPENSATION:** Up to \$212,000

## The Boston Consulting Group, Inc.

**SIGNING BONUS:** \$25,000  
**BASE SALARY:** \$147,000  
**RELOCATION:** \$2,000-\$5,000 depending on distance  
**PERFORMANCE BONUS:** Up to \$42,000  
**TOTAL COMPENSATION:** Up to \$219,000

## Accenture

**SIGNING BONUS:** \$35,000  
**BASE SALARY:** \$135,000  
**RELOCATION:** \$8,000  
**PERFORMANCE BONUS:** Up to \$43,500 for some graduate degrees  
**TOTAL COMPENSATION:** Up to \$221,500

## Bain & Company

**SIGNING BONUS:** \$25,000  
**BASE SALARY:** \$135,000  
**PERFORMANCE BONUS:** Up to \$35,000  
**TOTAL COMPENSATION:** Up to \$195,000<sup>11</sup>

## What locations provide the most opportunities for health care consultants?

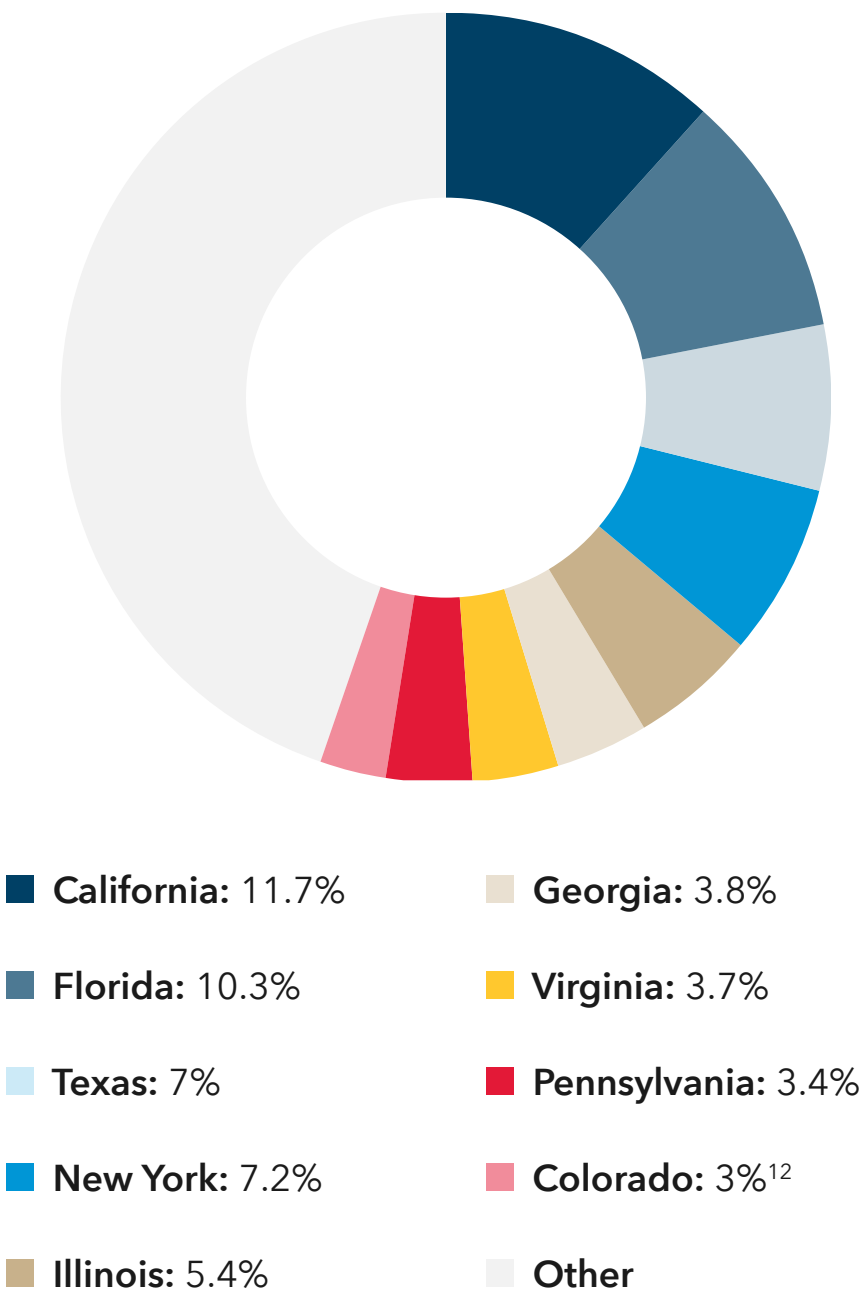
According to IBISWorld Market Research, the more densely populated areas of the country are closer to the key demand markets, like hospitals, pharmaceutical companies, health care providers and government clients. For 2015, the following regions provided the most opportunities for health care consultants:

**The Southeast** is home to 25.4 percent of the nation's population and 26.1 percent of the nation's health care consultants, which is the largest concentration in the country.

**The Mid-Atlantic** has 18.2 percent of the health care consultants in the nation, which is second highest but is disproportionate to per capita expectations (just 15.6 percent of the nation's population lives there). This is likely due to the fact that there are such high numbers of hospitals (20.3 percent of the nation's total), medical insurance companies (16.1 percent of the nation's total) and federal government facilities in the region.

**The West** has an estimated 16.7 percent of the nation's health care consultants. The high number of health care consultants is likely due to the fact that the West is a key center for hospital and pharmaceutical clients, so industry operators tend to locate in the vicinity.

Specifically, 3 percent or more of health care consultants in the nation are working in the following states:



## What traits or skills should a successful consultant possess?

Although expertise in a specific field is a plus, there are certain basic traits and skills that a successful consultant should possess. These positions are challenging and typically require a great deal of travel since consultants frequently work with clients on-site. Possessing the following traits will help support your success as a consultant:

### **Ability to work with minimal supervision:**

Consultants must be motivated self-starters who do not require close supervision to ensure that the needed work is getting done. When employers send them out to work with valuable clients, they have to be able to trust that the client's needs will be understood and that an expert level of service will be provided on task and on schedule.

### **Ability to communicate effectively and make use of excellent leadership skills:**

Consultants must be able to work well with others, lead teams in a collaborative manner and communicate effectively with clients for tasks such as providing presentations and interviewing external subject matter experts. In addition, as a leader, the ability to develop and implement strategic plans is essential and is the type of expertise that the client is counting on.

### **Ability to handle stress in a responsible manner:**

Clients often seek outside help due to an internal crisis of some type. Stress levels can be high, deadlines tight and the unexpected a frequent occurrence. A successful consultant needs to be able to handle such dynamics with a calm approach to help keep everyone on an even keel.

### **Ability to multi-task and think logically in a structured manner:**

Health care consultants are often involved with a variety of different projects for different clients at the same time. The ability to remain calm and organized by using critical thinking skills in a structured way is so important that it is tested in case interviews.

### **Ability to be flexible and travel frequently:**

Although teleconferencing is certainly put to great use, most health care consultants travel to the client's worksite to tend to project needs. In addition, last-minute needs and changes in deadlines mean that consultants must be flexible.

### **Ability to express eagerness and a willingness to learn:**

Consulting is an apprenticeship model in which new consultants learn from more experienced employees in the company. Attitude is everything – both in learning new skills and building the relationships that will be needed to spark career growth.

# THE WORK

## HEALTH CARE CONSULTANT INTERVIEWS

There are many types of problems and cases that a health care consultant might handle. To gain practical insight, we spoke with three health care consultants who have varied levels of experience and are currently working in the field.

### **Rex Holloway, Regional Vice President, Hammes Company, GW alumnus**

As a consulting leader with more than 10 years at Hammes Company, Holloway has focused on creating and implementing growth strategies for health systems – providing leadership on market strategy, facility and clinical service planning, physician alignment, business feasibility, and turnkey implementation for hospital and ambulatory projects and new service line initiatives. Throughout his 30-year career, he has gained vast experience within the industry, leading health care systems and providing strategic consulting for hospitals and physician groups.

### **Ammara Szuflita, Senior Consultant, Ernst & Young, GW alumnus**

Szuflita graduated from GW's Health Services Management and Leadership (HSML) program in 2012 with a master's degree in health services administration. Prior to attending graduate school, she worked as a quality review analyst at a community hospital in Oregon. Szuflita is a federal health care consultant at Ernst & Young and has served clients such as the Military Health System and the Defense Health Agency. Her primary focus is operating company model transformation and performance management.



### **Kimbra Wells Metz, Solutions Partner, Advisory Board Company**

With more than 15 years of health care leadership experience, Wells Metz possesses extensive expertise in a variety of capacities. She has held leadership roles across inpatient and outpatient operations and has worked in health care IT integration and transformation engagements for integrated delivery networks. She has also worked in the payer space, where she was responsible for care facilitation business line activities, and she has led organizations through the attainment of the Patient-Centered Medical Home distinction. In her current role, Wells Metz acts as a thought partner to CEOs and executives of member health systems – delivering programmatic oversight and coordination across all of the Advisory Board Company offerings.

Here, these experts provide their responses to four specific questions, as well as additional insights for those who are considering a career in health care consulting.



# What are some sample problems and cases that a health care consultant might handle?

## Rex Holloway

At this point in my career, I'm on the client relationship and business development side, making sure the team is on track with projects and providing and maintaining professional relationships with clients. My job is to listen to the voice of the customer relative to the quality of the product that we're delivering. To some degree, the use of consultancy, especially in small organizations, is to give them the ability to be flexible enough to meet a variety of needs.

“To some degree, the use of consultancy, especially in small organizations, is to give them the ability to be flexible enough to meet a variety of needs.”

– Rex Holloway

There are a few different directions for early careerists:

**1. Early careerists inside a health system:** When they are asked to work on a project with others, they're actually consulting within their own health care system. I think everyone should think of themselves as consultants in this light and organize their approach and methods to accomplish and solve a health care problem. I started my work in administration in a health care system, so we were internal consultants. If you're working in the corporate or leadership functions in finance, marketing, etc., these are really consultants within a company. When you're interviewing with consulting firms, you can use that experience, and it will be very important to couch that in terms of consulting skillsets and systems-oriented roles.

**2. Early careerists working in a consulting firm:** These individuals usually have very little experience and typically are working on skill-based tasks to support the lead consultant. This provides an incredible opportunity for exposure to the consulting world, helping them to build those skillsets. Mentoring support varies here, depending on the firm. Not all firms are interested in building a mentoring relationship, as they may not have a long-term goal of developing consultants. However, such an environment can still be of great value in order to learn the basics – as long as you understand the overall goals of the organization.

**3. Early careerists interested in a fast track to responsibility:** An early careerist (even right after an internship and with one to two years of experience) might have excellent project management and interpersonal skills, which are very specific skillsets of competency. With the right combination of prior experience from the internship and project management and of interpersonal and team management skills, these individuals can enjoy an early path to increased responsibility and leadership roles.

**Example:** A consultant organizing a project to work on quality improvement on cost management in a hospital. The most valuable skillset in this instance doesn't need to be technical, but rather someone who can work at a higher level to lead the project. In this way, an early careerist can build a career with the ability to be client forward-facing – since firms need consultants who can provide a high-quality and reliable interface with the client. It's very difficult to find someone with both this skillset and technical skills; this type of combination is typically found only in experienced consultants.

## Ammara Szuflita

**Cost cutting through process improvement (lean) in the hospital environment:** Most of our consultants are green belt certified for Lean Six Sigma and use this methodology to identify points that are wasteful. (The term “lean” – in health care and other industries – pertains to the process of “driving out waste so that all work adds value and serves the customer’s needs.”)

**We evaluate end-to-end processes, helping the client to understand what that looks like from a variety of perspectives.** As part of this process, we perform walk-throughs to understand what the pain points are and then try to implement process improvements in order to shorten that time. Clinicians are very receptive to this. They want the improvements, but patient care is their full-time job, and they don’t have time to do this themselves.

**Need for standardized business models and rules for consistency:** When clients have multiple locations, they’re trying to get to the same end result, but they’re so siloed that there’s often no standardization in practice to make that happen. We help them build new business models and processes that are more consistent to help them work toward similar outcomes.

**Program and department assessments or reviews:** I haven’t been specifically involved in this process, but I have colleagues who do case management reviews and help address any weaknesses that are discovered.

## Kimbra Wells Metz

I have a list of very key focus areas that are hot right now in the field, including:

- Health care reform and regulatory compliance
- Tech use and data transparency
- Operational efficiency and clinical outcomes
- Revenue cycle and physician engagement
- Change management and organizational effectiveness

In general, deciding what career path is best really has to start with an awareness of one’s strengths and what type of organizational culture will work best for you. I think there are some folks who have a good idea of a subject area, like the areas mentioned previously, that they want to be involved in. The great thing about consulting is that it gives you an opportunity to explore.

As a consultant, you work with a lot of really smart, hard-working people within a fast-paced culture that emphasizes outcomes and delivery value. You have to be comfortable with ambiguity and change.

In consulting, you’re typically working as an external change agent and thought partner with health systems that are figuring out how to adopt all of these new regulations, technology and data. They’re dealing with lots of change. Someone who is suited for this work would be a person who enjoys going into an organization they don’t know much about, learning the environment and then helping the organization develop a path to establish goals, manage change and become more efficient or effective.

When I started consulting, I had experience working in inpatient hospital operations. I worked for a Blues plan (Blue Cross Blue Shield) where I worked on population health, ambulatory care and medical homes. It offered a pretty broad array of experiences that let me see that I liked being a change agent in a lot of different scenarios with a lot of different organizations. If someone likes that, then consulting would be a good fit for them. Even exploring that gives you a good avenue for exposure. I think it also provides the opportunity for insight into what the culture is like in many different organizations, which helps you define as an early careerist what type of culture would work for you.

“In consulting, you’re typically working as an external change agent and thought partner with health systems that are figuring out how to adopt all of these new regulations, technology and data.”

– Kimbra Wells Metz

# What's a typical day like for a health care consultant?

## Rex Holloway

My days are different now than what they were when I was early in my career, so I'll talk about what that is usually like for an early careerist.

This is great work for individuals who have short attention spans, since they work on a variety of different projects at different points in the life of a given project all at the same time. The job each day is to recognize their own personal project management in order to achieve a balance of taking care of each task in an efficient manner. Firms count on the fact that everyone will hold each other accountable to do this.

A significant dynamic is related to billable hours and the learning curve associated with being an early careerist. Most firms are very mindful of the individual tasks of a project, its overall scope and the related billable hours. New consultants are generally expected to be fairly fully billable, but it will take them twice as long to get things done. However, they can't tell anyone that since they can't bill all of that extra time to make up for the learning curve. The budget is set for each project, so they can't bill for being over their allotted hours for a task. However, if they're really good, then they'll get billed out to other clients – which is good for further career development. Every early careerist is expected to work very hard, and they do it with an eye on the future prize of career rewards down the road.

The beauty of consulting, unlike working within a single institution, is that it's often easier to draw insights by working with similar types of situations across many organizations.

## Ammara Szuflita

My days start at 8 a.m. and go until 5 p.m. If I did not respond to e-mails the night before (which is fairly common) I catch up on the ones from Ernst & Young, the client and my team members, and "triage" the most important e-mails in order to prioritize the day. If something needs to get done immediately (usually for the client), that's what I work on first.

Most days I have at least two project-related meetings (either with the client, my team or project manager who "runs the show" for the engagement).

“The beauty of consulting, unlike working within a single institution, is that it's often easier to draw insights by working with similar types of situations across many organizations.”

– Rex Holloway

As I am a workstream lead (meaning I am responsible for the daily tasks for a component of the engagement), I host two standing calls each week: one for the client and the other for my workstream (I oversee three staff members). Depending on the task at hand, I delegate much of the project work to my staff members and provide guidance and a quality review of all work products. I also support work products for other workstreams, which requires many ad hoc meetings and interactions to get the job done.

Aside from client work, I am usually involved in extracurricular Ernst & Young activities to support the firm, which may include hosting training sessions for our practice, coordinating recruiting events with GW or wrapping presents during the holidays.

If you get through those first two years, you're considered an "oldie," and my role has definitely changed in this third year. In the first two years, it was task-oriented work that I completed as assigned. Actually, it was very straightforward and I enjoyed it. But now that I'm a senior consultant, I have a team that I oversee, and I am expected to provide them with the necessary project tasks, mentoring, structure and coaching. So now I do all of that, as well as producing work products.

I appreciate the environment at Ernst & Young because they are very committed to your personal and professional growth, and they foster both. If you get bored with something, they'll give you something more challenging to work on. But you have to speak up; otherwise, they wouldn't know.

Billable hours are a priority since that's how the company receives revenue. When consultants are benched, which means there is no billable project to work on, they are not generating any revenue for the company. It was infrequent, but when I was benched a few times in my first two years, I was able to take that time to build my skills and work on internal projects until chargeable work was ready. If you are benched, it doesn't last long since there are managers specifically tasked with finding billable work for everyone.



## Kimbra Wells Metz

I probably have more autonomy at my level now, but as an early careerist, you're constantly looking at your calendar to make sure you have all the right meetings scheduled with the right people to effect change and keep things on track. You have autonomy with that, but you also have help. Some of that work will be done from home, from a desk in an office, from an airplane or from a hotel room. Similar to other jobs, you're in a lot of meetings where you're not actually getting a lot of work done, and you have to balance that.

I will say that with my company, we are really focused on balance, so we are strict about not e-mailing after 5 p.m. or on the weekend. I've been very impressed with the Advisory Board in that light. Overall, I'm seeing that as a trend that's starting to take shape: As we're increasingly connected all the time, everyone needs to have downtime, and most people need to be forced to do it. We have meeting-free Fridays internally, although we try to make sure we're available for clients. The Advisory Board is very committed to ensuring work-life balance, so the culture is very much about balancing self-management and performance.

As far as opportunities, you have to be your own best advocate and proactively engage others. Those who look for more opportunities are given them. I mentor a lot of people and really enjoy that, so I'm always asking what else they'd like to do, and then I give them more responsibility. My organization has extensive training available to help individuals develop, and there are many courses they can take.



“As far as opportunities, you have to be your own best advocate and proactively engage others. Those who look for more opportunities are given them.”

– Kimbra Wells Metz

# What does the lifestyle of a health care consultant entail?

## Rex Holloway

Being flexible and nimble is valuable, and both are on the same side of the coin as having a short attention span. Individuals with those qualities find consulting to be a good fit. If an early careerist is gathering a lot of data at a client site, they may be on the road three to four days a week.

Most early careerists spend a great deal of time gathering, analyzing and presenting data for lead consultants. Therefore, skillsets in Microsoft and database applications are pretty important in consulting firms.

Even if early careerists are located at a regional office, they may be asked to go to any client location that the company needs, but they would typically not be sent overseas unless they had a very valuable skillset.

Even when you have an MHA, it's very valuable for the early careerist to start in a health care organization for the first three to five years to develop credibility and skills. After that, you can decide what path you'd like to pursue in consulting. I think the ability to move back and forth between the two environments brings more value to each environment every time you make the change.

## Ammara Szuflita

Depending on the consultant's client or engagement, many travel for their projects. Personally, as a consultant for the federal health sector, I do not travel frequently since our clients are in the immediate D.C. metro area, so I cannot speak to this. However, travel is typically a major consulting characteristic. Aside from this aspect, consultants must be flexible to meet client demands. I believe consulting is a delicate balance between giving the client what they want and advising them on what is best. Another important aspect of consulting is networking, which is critical because this is how we develop existing client relationships and create new ones, which leads to future work.

Being flexible is a big, big deal for health care consultants. You might be working on a specific solution for weeks, your partner has signed off on it, and you're very excited about it. However, when you present it to the client, they decide it's not the solution they think is best. You have to recognize and be able to accept the fact that even if you think you have a perfect solution, the client is still the expert in the space. You have to find a delicate balance between listening to their expertise and providing them with the honest feedback and solutions they hired you for. It's essential that you learn to not take things personally and to not be sensitive when your solutions aren't accepted. You have to just adjust and start over as needed.

During my graduate program, I did a one-year internship within a hospital, and that was so valuable for me because it exposed me to the basics of what most health care clients deal with. When you work with them, they can tell whether or not you have that type of background and understanding.

## Kimbra Wells Metz

There's a lot of travel. Depending on the role, I'd say it makes up 30 to 75 percent of the job, with 50 percent on average. This field offers a greater opportunity for consultants to be geographically flexible, which is especially helpful for me since I need to move every few years due to my spouse's career. This aspect helps me stay with one organization and grow.

There's a lot of autonomy to self-manage. This is less true for an early careerist, but more true in consulting than for other early careerists who are working in health care delivery. There are more options for working from home, and you have to develop the skills that enable you to be effective with people through video and telephonic conferencing, as well as working with others remotely who are in different time zones.

Consultants have very Type A personalities. We're high-energy, work-hard, play-hard types. However, you're operating with such talent that you have to be comfortable not being the number one person on your team. Instead, since you're working with lots of talent, you're all No. 1. For myself, I needed to find the right company culture and role to apply my strengths and talents.

“You have to recognize and be able to accept the fact that even if you think you have a perfect solution, the client is still the expert in the space.”

– Ammara Szuflita

## If health care consultants work in management consulting firms, are they expected to work on projects that are not related to health care?

### Rex Holloway

There's so much need in health care that I think the dynamic would be the other way around, and consultants from other sectors are being pulled in to work on health care projects.

“If you don't like change and ambiguity and if you don't like a fast-paced environment, then you probably don't want to be a consultant.”

– Kimbra Wells Metz

### Ammara Szuflita

This depends. Through my personal experiences at Ernst & Young, our firm is committed to the consultant's professional and personal development. If consultants want to strictly stay within their comfort zone (e.g., health care), they can (project permitting). In some instances, when consultants are “benched” (meaning they do not have billable work), the firm may place consultants in other projects so they become utilized and billable. Since Ernst & Young is such a large firm, there are many opportunities for consultants to cross over to different sectors or service lines to gain other opportunities and skills. For me, my current project is not directly related to health care (e.g., ancillary department), but the project is for a health care agency.

If we're working on a niche project, a consultant would probably be hired specifically for that project, instead of pulling another consultant from within the company that didn't have the needed experience. However, I've worked with many consultants from varied backgrounds on health care projects, and the teams in these cases were specifically built in that manner to provide a broader range of insight and creativity.

### Kimbra Wells Metz

When you're choosing the company you want to work with, you have to be aware of that dynamic and decide: Are you open to whatever doors are open, or do you only want to work in health care? If you really want to align your strengths with health care, you should make sure you're on a path to working on a health care project. You have to be your own advocate and know what you need. It doesn't hurt if you're asked to work on a different type of project; just know that it could happen.

Typically, you get pulled into a particular group or team with a specific focus, and it shouldn't go beyond that. Even if you're a clinical person, you may be asked to help in finance, etc., but if it's a health care group, the focus is still there. There's a difference between subject-matter experts and a generalist who is more focused on the dynamics of what consultants provide in terms of effectiveness.

Overall, knowing yourself is key – what you like, what you don't like and what you're good at or not. If you don't like change and ambiguity and if you don't like a fast-paced environment, then you probably don't want to be a consultant. But, if you like all of that and want to figure out where you can do it – consulting is a good place to find out.



## In order to achieve success in consulting overall, Holloway says that:

Developing a personal method to assess and solve problems with others is key. That personal method can be drawn from early consulting roles and developed according to your own unique style. The more you practice your own methods and synthesize your experiences and training to do so, the more consistent you can be in your approach. When you continually own that and improve upon it, you'll bring increased value to whatever environment you're in.

When working with a client, it's important to understand that the data and the explicit issues are often not as important as the underlying problems and hidden issues. Finding the hidden connections and possessing the ability to understand them is an often unearthed gem of consulting success. However, it takes a concerted effort to develop the needed level of trust with a client to get there – to get the full picture of the connections between people and systems. The tip of the iceberg is the digital data. The bottom of the iceberg – what sinks the ship – are these underlying issues. It takes strong interpersonal skills to find out what they are.



“When working with a client, it's important to understand that the data and the explicit issues are often not as important as the underlying problems and hidden issues.”

– Rex Holloway

# THE APPLICATION PROCESS

## What are the do's and don'ts of a consulting-focused cover letter?

The cover letter is an essential component of applying for health care consulting positions. Recruiters and interviewers use the cover letter to substantiate your resume, glean context for your story and get a sense of who you are to determine whether you would be a good fit for the organization. It also provides you with the opportunity to highlight connections you have in the firm, significant accomplishments and your ability to write well in an organized manner. Here are some specific do's and don'ts to keep in mind:

### Do's

**Do** personalize your cover letter and emphasize connections you have in the firm. This is one of the key strategies for getting your cover letter read by a recruiter – and why networking is essential.

**Do** provide major highlights of your experience, including prestigious schools and companies, a careful selection of awards or programs, and key degrees that you hold.

**Do** tell your story, focusing on quantifiable achievements related to actual things you did, and tell one or two of your success stories in depth.

**Do** use a positive tone of confidence with clear and straightforward language that demonstrates your value to the firm.

**Do** use the standard format for a cover letter:

- An introductory paragraph and thesis statement that state the position you're applying for, what your current situation is and what skills and experience you will contribute to the firm.
- One or two strong paragraphs with examples and an in-depth description of one or two specific successes that highlight your skills related to consulting.
- One paragraph about why you want to be a consultant and why you're specifically interested in this firm.
- A conclusion of two to three lines summarizing your key skills, your interest in the job and your desire for an interview.

### Don'ts

**Don't** make your cover letter a summary of your resume. This would waste valuable space that could be used to promote yourself, and it might make you appear inefficient to the firm.

**Don't** use vague terms such as "I feel," "I think" or "I believe," as they will make you appear less than confident.

**Don't** underestimate your competition. You need to demonstrate that you are versatile and could excel across a variety of roles.

**Don't** overlook the basics, such as using poor grammar, focusing on weaknesses, using long and complicated sentences, using tiny and unreadable fonts, being too boring, being too aggressive or including too many acronyms.

**Don't** make your cover letter longer than one page or less than three-fourths of a page. The former will make you appear inefficient, and the latter will make it appear that you didn't put enough effort into your work.<sup>15</sup>

## What are the do's and don'ts of a consulting-focused resume?

The cover letter is often the hook to get a recruiter or reviewer's attention, and the resume is the substance that demonstrates the benefits you will provide for a firm. Management consultants look at resumes through the lens of three primary criteria: strong academic performance, strong work experience and leadership.<sup>16</sup> In that light, when applying for consulting positions, there are some specific do's and don'ts to keep in mind for your resume.

### Do's

**Do** include the basics, such a header section with personal information, sections for work experience, educational background and miscellaneous interests, skills and activities.

**Do** use bulleted text as opposed to paragraphs, and use a format that [emphasizes results](#) – qualitative or quantitative.

**Do** include specifics for each job, such as title, location and length of time in the position, as well as specific projects and experiences. These bullets should be about what you specifically did, not a job description of what you were hired to do.

**Do** put yourself in the reviewer's shoes. He or she will be assessing your resume for two to three minutes on average to decide if you warrant an interview.

**Do** send it as a PDF so there are no formatting or access issues, put your name in a font bigger than the rest of the text on the page and proofread for typos.

**Do** emphasize skills and experience related to consulting, including team leadership, client interaction, analytics and research, and quantifiable results.

### Don'ts

**Don't** make it longer than one page unless you have extensive experience, in which case two pages would be the maximum.

**Don't** include a lead "summary" or "objectives" section, but ensure that these details are clearly communicated in your achievements.

**Don't** focus too much on your education, unless it is truly impressive.

**Don't** include excessive details since less is more and the resume is better suited for a quick analysis of key skills and successes.

**Don't** forget to promote yourself – especially if you have experience in a health system in any type of systems-oriented role. Even if your title wasn't "consultant," you were acting as one when working on projects with others. Frame your self-promotion language in terms of skillsets that consultants need to use.<sup>17</sup>



## How does someone apply for a health care consulting position?

The traditional route for applying for a consulting position is through the recruitment process that consulting firms use through universities, which typically occurs according to the school's academic schedule. However, many firms also engage in off-cycle and off-campus recruiting, and they are always looking for talent. Candidates who wish to apply through this path will need to work a little harder, focus more on work experience and take a slightly different approach. The following are key strategies and options to keep in mind:

**Network extensively.** It's one of the most important things a potential applicant should do.

One [Bain consultant](#) noted that having an internal recommendation would double a candidate's chances of getting an interview.<sup>18</sup> Reach out to well-connected contacts – such as school alumni or professional colleagues – who work in the health care industry or at that firm, and inform everyone you know about your goals. Important relationships may exist that you're not aware of. Be creative, think beyond your immediate circle and build relationships by being specific and direct. Many candidates also connect with headhunters, particularly if they have some work experience.<sup>19</sup>

### **Be professional at company recruiting events.**

If consulting firms are holding events on your campus, be sure to dress professionally, meet at least three to four consultants, ask for their business cards and follow up to ask for advice about applying and interviewing with the firm.<sup>20</sup>

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### **Be creative, think beyond your immediate circle and build relationships by being specific and direct.**

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**Make firm connections.** If your school isn't part of the recruitment loop, explore the websites of the firms you are interested in. Find out what positions they have available, what they're looking for in candidates, and how you can apply online. If possible, reach out to the recruiting team at the firm and ask them to put you in touch with someone internally. Once relationships are established, provide multiple points of contact so they can communicate with you easily, and keep them regularly updated on your application process. When you submit your application online, be sure to reference your relationships with current employees.

**Maximize your connections.** As your relationship develops – or if it's someone who's already a friend – structure your questions and requests for feedback professionally:

- Schedule official calls – even if it's a friend – to get the professional-level insights you need.
- Be prepared with 8 to 10 questions, and ask if they'd be willing to review your resume and cover letter with the firm's specific needs in mind.
- Ask for advice about the best approach to breaking into the firm based on your background and experience.
- Ask if they'd be willing to provide an internal recommendation for you – including sending your information to recruiters or flagging an online application that you submit.<sup>21</sup>

# THE INTERVIEW

## What is the interview process like?

Most consulting firms have both a “fit interview,” to determine whether candidates have the personality traits to be successful at that firm, and a “case interview,” which is a critical part of the process to assess problem-solving skills. In the case interview, case studies are used that provide descriptions of real or hypothetical problems in business, and candidates are then expected to analyze the issues and recommend solutions.

The case interview is the major factor that influences hiring decisions since it helps interviewers assess whether a candidate possesses the skills that consultants use on a daily basis, including:

- The ability to understand business fundamentals.
- The ability to think analytically.
- The ability to use insights that are both creative and business-oriented.
- The ability to communicate and present solutions clearly.

These interviews will differ based on the firm, or they may even vary within a firm based on different office locations. In general, there will be at least two rounds of interviews (a first and a final), with at least two interviews that each last about an hour. Often, the first round is held somewhere close to the applicant (e.g., the firm’s office in that particular city), and the final round is held in the office for which the applicant is interviewing.

These interviews could be all fit, all case or a combination of the two (e.g., 15 minutes of fit, a half hour case, and a few minutes at the end for questions). Additional potential interview methods include a written case (when an interviewee is given a PowerPoint slide deck either on the spot or ahead of the interview and must distill relevant points and present them to an interviewer), an Excel test or a general knowledge test. The last general knowledge test is usually reserved for nontraditional applicants.

Since there is such an extensive focus on case reviews, experts recommend that candidates start case preparation well before the interview is scheduled. There are many resources that provide practice scenarios, some of which are included at the end of this guide, and it is helpful to have someone who has been through the process practice with you. Since timing is critical, you should consider the length of your answers, as well as the balance of asking questions and providing responses.

Although the case review is a critical component of the interview process, the behavioral component of the interview is usually just as important. Remember that potential employers are evaluating candidates based on how they will perform on-site with clients, so making the most of personality and professionalism is key as well. In addition, interviewers will expect follow-up questions, so be prepared with specific questions that go beyond the generic inquiry.<sup>22</sup>

The ability to think on your feet is essential during the case interview, but you can be better prepared with practice. There are a number of case studies and sample interview questions available through various sources, like those at [www.consultingcase101.com](http://www.consultingcase101.com).

## How can I stand out from other job candidates?

In addition to the basics of professionalism, including appropriate dress, punctuality and a polished resume, there are other things you can do to stand out with a firm.

### **Build connections in the firm prior to the interview.**

Talk to people who work there to get a sense of the work they do and whether you would enjoy working there. In general, this is known as an informational interview.

### **If you have health care experience, highlight it.**

Rex Holloway, of Hammes Company, says that candidates with previous experience in a health care setting have the benefit of understanding the context of issues that health care clients face and should highlight this knowledge during their interviews. "I started my work in administration in a health care system, so we were internal consultants," he says.

### **Couch your experience in consulting terms.**

Holloway also notes that "if you're working in the corporate or leadership functions in finance, marketing, etc., these are really consultants within a company. When you're interviewing with consulting firms, you can use that experience, and it will be very important to couch that in terms of consulting skillsets and systems-oriented roles."

**Excel in your performance on case reviews.** This is typically the area in which candidates are the least prepared, so you have a great opportunity to stand out by being better prepared than the rest. Here, the key is practice, practice, practice.

**Ask great questions.** Be prepared to ask about specifics, such as challenging client issues, the most exciting projects, advice for getting started, mistakes that new hires make and the best way to get specific industry experience.

**Ask for detailed feedback.** Don't be in a rush to head out the door; instead, ask the interviewer for feedback on your performance while impressions are fresh. In addition to the fact that it will help you prepare for the next round of interviews, it shows your commitment to learning from others and your willingness to grow.

**Follow up.** Ask for a business card, and then follow up with questions that build on the feedback you received or issues that came up in the interview, such as specific sectors you may be interested in pursuing. Remaining engaged with the interviewer and showing that you're interested and proactive are qualities that definitely help in securing a position.

**Remember a few interesting facts.** Taking some key tidbits from the first interview into the next round shows your attention to detail and familiarity with the firm. Since interviewers often know each other, showing a connection to the first interviewer outside of the interview (this is why follow-up is key) is an important differentiator when selections are made.<sup>23</sup>





# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

There are a number of excellent resources that you can access for additional fine-tuning if you decide to pursue a career as a health care consultant. Here are just a few:

## Help for your cover letter and resume

- [www.managementconsulted.com](http://www.managementconsulted.com)
- [www.consultingjunkie.com](http://www.consultingjunkie.com)
- [Resume tips from McKinsey & Company](#)

## Case studies

- [www.consultingcase101.com](http://www.consultingcase101.com)
- [Deloitte Consulting Case Prep Tool](#)
- [Bain interview prep site](#)
- [McKinsey Problem Solving Practice Test iPhone App](#)

## Essential reading related to health care consulting

- [Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don't](#) by Jim Collins
- [The Well-Managed Healthcare Organization, 7th Edition](#) by Kenneth R. White and John R. Griffith
- [Case Interview Secrets: A Former McKinsey Interviewer Reveals How to Get Multiple Job Offers in Consulting](#) by Victor Cheng
- [The World's Newest Profession: Management Consulting in the Twentieth Century](#) by Christopher D. McKenna
- [The New How: Creating Business Solutions Through Collaborative Strategy](#) by Nilofer Merchant
- [Flawless Consulting](#) by Peter Block
- [McKinsey's Marvin Bower: Vision, Leadership, and the Creation of Management Consulting](#) by Elizabeth Haas Edersheim

For more suggestions, visit [www.consultingcase101.com/reading-list](http://www.consultingcase101.com/reading-list).

A career as a health care consultant can offer a challenging and enriching future. However, breaking into the field can be difficult without the right tools and preparation. A graduate education is key to providing you with the knowledge base and skillset that are required, as Rex Holloway of Hammes Company so eloquently noted:

"The MHA degree provides an understanding of overall context and a system-wide view that are needed to be a great consultant in health care. A consultant with an MBA may come with great business skills, such as strength in corporate finance, but the MHA degree helps the consultant to understand and deal with the unique challenges of the health care environment immediately. Essentially, it's a liberal arts degree in health care, and provides a basis for holistic systems-thinking related to this field to help organizations meet the Triple Aim of improving quality, increasing access and decreasing costs."

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