



Podcast Transcript

Risk Never Sleeps

Episode 74

Joel Klein

Ed Gaudet: Welcome to the Risk Never Sleeps Podcast, in which we learn about the people that are on the front lines, delivering and protecting patient care. I'm Ed Gaudet, the host of our program, and I am pleased to be joined today by Joel Klein, senior vice president and CIO at the University of Maryland Medical Center. Good day, sir. How are you?

Joel Klein: I'm great. How are you?

Ed Gaudet: Great. All right, let's get started. So tell us about your organization and a little bit about your role.

Joel Klein: Sure. Well, thanks, first of all, for having me. So I'm the head of IT for our health system. University of Maryland medical system. It's a 12-hospital system located here in Maryland, headquartered in Baltimore. We have a large academic flagship quaternary care hospital located just a couple of blocks that way down the street. That includes our shock trauma center, which is a fairly world-famous place where patients with serious traumatic injury are cared for. It's got a pedes hospital. It's got it's a big academic, typical academic, large, complicated place with very complicated patients. And then we have a whole series of community hospitals ranging from bigger ones to medium sized ones. We have a rehab hospital, and then we have dozens and dozens of ambulatory practices that have all of the providers that work in those hospitals.



Joel Klein (cont'd): Many of our providers are employed, but we have lots and lots of community physicians who care for patients in our hospital. We have a strong affiliation with the University of Maryland School of Medicine and School of Nursing. The faculty of the School of Medicine are the attending physician community of our flagship hospital. We are not part of the university system, though we are a separate, separately organized nonprofit company that was actually created by the state, I think, 40 years ago, something like that.

Ed Gaudet: Okay.

Joel Klein: So I'm responsible for all of the IT in that organization. So that includes our electronic medical records, our business systems, security network phones, all that good stuff.

Ed Gaudet: I noticed you went to Johns Hopkins. Do you have any affiliation with them at all or so?

Joel Klein: They are the other system in town. They are. If we're going to go with The Wire, I guess they're East Baltimore, and we're more West Side.

Ed Gaudet: Okay.

Joel Klein: I'm not sure that actually plays out with patients all over. And so today. So, I'm actually an emergency physician by training. I went to college back east in med school in Texas and then ended up at Hopkins. My wife and I wanted a big East Coast city, and I vetoed New York. And it was Boston, D.C., and this was like D.C., so Hopkins was an amazing place.

Ed Gaudet: Okay, excellent. I did notice you were an ER doctor. Are you still practicing or?

Joel Klein: No, I practiced through about the first half of Covid. So, sometime 2021, something like that was my last shift. So, I got hired at one of those community hospitals in our system. It was actually before it got acquired by our system. It was just a little independent hospital, North Arundel Hospital, and it was an amazing job. I was the night guy for many years and a very busy E.R. I almost I was over 100,000 patients, actually, for four years. It was very, very big. Wow.

Joel Klein (cont'd): I eventually ran the group. There was 60 providers just at the single hospital. And then we got acquired by the system. And then the longer story of how I got into technology. But that's right, I was I practiced in the community for almost 20 years.

Ed Gaudet: And how did you decide to go into healthcare?

Joel Klein: Gosh, that's a great question. When I got to college, I didn't know what was going to happen. There were lots of people who knew me who thought I should be a lawyer because I argued with everybody. There you go. And I don't know, I always had a strong I was nobody in my family medicine. Certainly not my parents, none of my extended family. There's a family business that makes industrial kitchen-like equipment, custom kitchens for restaurants, and stuff like that pretty off the wall. My mom was a school teacher. I think for me, being secure, not just financially, but having a profession that I knew was where I could always get a job, where I wasn't going to have to worry about how I would make a living, and that I could make a living on my own merits, but be less subject to the tides, or which way the wind was blowing. That idea was in my head when I was a teenager or early 20s, and I took biology as a freshman, and I really got lucky; I loved it; I had great professors, and I thought, well, I'll keep going. And so I kept going, and now I'm here.

Ed Gaudet: The rest is history. That's awesome. And as you look out over the next couple of years, what are some of your priorities?

Joel Klein: I don't think I'm any different than any other healthcare leader. Certainly, healthcare technology leader in the United States cost by far, and I wish it were. I wish it were something else. But we've got to figure out how to take care of our community in a more cost-effective manner. And that is that that is a middle eastern level crazy question like that does not have an obvious answer, much like Middle Eastern peace, unfortunately. And I don't pretend to know exactly how it's going to work, but it's not sustainable. What we're doing, and certainly technology, is a huge piece of our industry.

Joel Klein (cont'd): So that's one big thing. We are committed as a health system to being more digital-first for our community. So we're doing a ton of work. We already have a pretty robust online platform and presence that we're very proud of, but what else can we do there? I think is another area of focus. And then I think our health system is one that has grown through acquisition, not unlike many others. And the journey of integration, what that looks like, how do we act like a system, whether it's purchasing power or by not figuring out the same thing 12 times, which is what a lot of young systems do, I think that's another big opportunity for us. So it's all great stuff.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah. And speaking of costs, one of those areas that I hear often from CIOs and other leaders is the ability to be resilient when hit with risks that systemic risks or other risks that we hadn't really scheduled for. So yeah, that's a big and, especially these days with the risk of the change obviously incident.

Joel Klein: Yeah.

Ed Gaudet: And I'm sure more that'll be coming at us over the next year or so.

Joel Klein: Yeah. So the change thing is a great example of something that illustrates systemic risk to the system. What's the too-big-to-fail kind of question? In many ways, we were one of the Kronos victims a number of years ago, along with a number of other big companies. So that's another example. I think it's beyond just vendors having bad things happen to them. I think we're seeing a lot of our vendors get, for instance, acquired either by another company or by private equity or whatever, and suddenly, the price triples. And I get it. This is capitalism, and that's how that works. But there's a point of really, and I think a lot of us are wondering how would we pivot if we, I mean because there's a price, right? There's some price for any vendor where you would say, nope, that's too much. And being explicit about that, at least internally and starting to actively risk manage that, that's that's a tough challenge.



Ed Gaudet: I also think vendors should be a lot more proactive about supporting the shared mission. We all talk about it, but then, when it comes down to dollars and cents, people are all focused on the transaction. And we're a big believer in balancing profit with philanthropic initiatives as well. And I think we should be driving that more and more into the ecosystem as a community.

Joel Klein: Yeah, I totally agree. And it's interesting when you think about, again, without getting specific about vendors, but there are some vendors, some of the privately held ones, I think are a little, you know, better able to do this than ones that have to answer to the market more readily. Maybe it's a way of putting it, but one of the words that people use, at least on my team, is how evil is a vendor. And that's a terrible thing to hear. But that's what I hear. And whether they're coming in to audit something or whether they're how long are they going to support something that's perfectly good, but they want an end of life so that they can move on to the next thing. Or how much are we being asked to handle product updates that aren't meaningful, but it's claimed they are? So it's all of those things. And so, again, it's part of life. It's the responsibility we have to help keep our environment safe to help keep our community able to do the things they need to do. That's what they're paying me and my team to do, and that's no problem. But you're right; some are better at it.

Ed Gaudet: As we look at those things that are obviously top of mind, what else keeps you up at night?

Joel Klein: Well, cybersecurity is definitely the obvious given, and it's interesting. It's not that I don't think a lot about our own environment, just the two examples we've talked about briefly change in Kronos; it's a third-party risk that is really emerging as the reality here. So whether we're talking about suppliers, payers, I mean, we have a lot of strategic vendors that we we operate very closely with. And again, there are alternatives to everything. But that transition can be really difficult, especially if everyone else is doing it. And if you have to do it in a hurry. Yeah. And you don't want to over how do you focus your effort and attention. We're a \$5 billion company. We have a lot of vendors. So where do you start, and what risk do you incur by consolidating? All right. So that's something we're trying to do. But yet that creates its own risk. So that's all one big bucket of things I also really worry about our workforce.

Joel Klein (cont'd): So again, I was I if the air isn't the front line it's pretty close to it. And when I go there now to visit my old partners or when I talk to nurses and doctors of all kinds throughout the organization, it's not as bad as it was during the pandemic. I think that was the low point, for sure. At least, that's what I feel. Things are changing. There's, for instance, violence in our hospitals. I don't understand that, but it's it is a problem, and it's everything from visitor violence to patient on staff. It's all kinds of things. And but it's also just a general sense of, I think again this is industrywide of how do we get through the day. It's this is probably one of the most constructive, appealing, and positive places from a healthcare point of view to work the hospital I got hired; I love that place. I was there the other day for something, and it's like coming home. It's a great place. It feels like home to me. But that doesn't mean it's easy to do the work so you can be a great place, but it's still a little bit the reality of caring for people here today in 2024. So, how can I help with that? How can I sand down splinters for people on the computer systems? How can I make things five seconds faster? How can I make them smile? Whether it's Happy Birthday or I don't know, you'd be surprised. Stupid stuff. It works. So it's it's all that.

Ed Gaudet: A human touch goes a long way. And, of course, physicians love saving clicks. So whatever you can do to help them save clicks, that's. I've heard that. I bet you've experienced it.

Joel Klein: So it's funny, but they have a sense of humor. One of the we're an epic shop. So one of the the epic dirty, you know, things that that we hate to do is the epic best practice advisory, the BPA. So that's a pop-up thing that appears at the middle of your workflow to quack at you and tell you to do something. Yeah. And if you implement those out of the box, it's this big red warning. You're about to do something bad. We started something a few years ago where you had to put a picture, like some illustration. That was about the thing if, for instance, if it was a reminder to get a palliative care consult, there was there was a picture. I forget exactly what it was, but it was this idea of a piece, a patient who was peaceful and had their symptoms managed. And just look what you look at the picture. You're like, oh yeah, that's okay. And during the pandemic, don't forget to order the Covid test had that famous picture of Fauci in the press conference. Yeah, you took one look at it, and you're like, oh yeah, I know. So it's one smile a day. Yeah. Where you can, it's dumb stuff. But even doctors.

Ed Gaudet: No, you bring humor into it because, at the end of the day, we're all people, and we all love to laugh. I think most of us, anyway. So yeah, we have a newsletter and I, I create these cartoons that just poke fun of our industry because I just think it's, yeah, an opportunity to kind of laugh at ourselves. And that's a really good point. So is epic still doing the the click counter where they show you like the previous version? How many clicks? And now the new version.

Joel Klein: Yeah. The workflow. What's it called? It's the it's not called the click counter but it's something like that. There's a measure. It's clicks, it's screen jumps, it's mouse to keyboard hand movements. They have a whole team now. That's their usability team that focuses on really good software design. Because once you buy epic, you're in the design business. You really you need to understand interior decorating and aesthetics and all that because absolutely it matters.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah, you live in it, so you want it. You want it to be effective and pleasing. So, you mentioned the pandemic. Tough time for a lot of folks. What are you most personally or professionally proud of over the last couple of years?

Joel Klein: Oh boy, that's really tough. Our teams have done such amazing. The pandemic was. So, we were one of the places that stood up a field hospital in our convention center with the army that was saying it was even crazier was we vaccinated around 600,000 people in Ravens Stadium, just down the way at MIT and an NFL stadium, and we put our tech. All of our tech was what powered that thing. And when you walk in there and just look around and you realize this is the work of a lifetime, that you could rise to the occasion and do all this. I'm so proud of our guys for doing it. I guess the thing is, there's a lot of things like that. We've put in a ton of we've put in an ERP, we've put in all these different systems. Um, but I guess if you're asking what am I personally the most proud of, I honestly it's we have a completely, almost a completely new team of IT leaders now. So it's really remaking the team with folks that I am just very proud of, people that I think have what the organization needs in terms of service ethic, responsiveness, customer service. Um, do you get it? Like, this is what being a shared service is all about. This is how this is what the hospitals need of us and serve.

Ed Gaudet: Leave your attitude at the door.

Joel Klein: That's right. You are not taking care of people, but yet you are directly. And how do you lean into all of that? And how do you breathe that down to your teams? And now we'll all be meeting together. And I have a sense of this is the right bunch of people. Ain't nobody perfect. I'm not perfect. But getting the right team, yeah, you can do so much with that, so forth. Yeah, I think that's probably the.

Ed Gaudet: The right team becomes a force multiplier to you, the business, and the overall strategy. People are not just thinking about the moment, but they're thinking about where are we going over the next few years. And they can both concepts at once. Right. Which is a rarity, unfortunately. Yeah. That's great. So, outside of healthcare, outside of IT, what are you most passionate of? What would you be doing if you were doing this job?

Joel Klein: Gosh. So, I have two amazing kids. They're 15 and 17.

Ed Gaudet: Great ages.

Joel Klein: Yeah. We're.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah, they're out of that. They're out of that. Hopefully, they're out of that.

Joel Klein: They're in that phase where they're not sure that we know what we're talking about.

Ed Gaudet: Oh, so you need a couple more years before they realize how smart you've become.

Joel Klein: That's what I hear. Although it could also be right. No. They're amazing. And every now and then, they'll do something that makes you realize maybe you did okay. Yeah. And that even they're in person, too. That's a big thing. We travel a lot. We took them to Portugal over the winter break, and we were in Italy last summer. And so traveling is a big deal for us.

Joel Klein (cont'd): I used to cook professionally, so I love to cook, and while I don't know that I would open a restaurant or a bar or something like that, there are times when I feel like that would be awesome. I'm trying to learn to play the drums, so I,

Ed Gaudet: Oh, really?

Joel Klein: Yeah, I got to practice back there.

Ed Gaudet: I took the drums when I was a kid.

Joel Klein: Oh, okay.

Ed Gaudet: I'm huge into music.

Joel Klein: Yeah.

Ed Gaudet: So that's cool.

Joel Klein: So I've got some hobbies that do occupy me for sure.

Ed Gaudet: So tell me about the drums. What type of music are you into? What do you?

Joel Klein: Yeah, I grew up in the 80s, so I personally think that I could have been Alex Van Halen, not Neil Peart. I'm not good enough for that, but I could have helped him out a little bit if he'd gotten sick or something. So I've started I've been listening to a lot of the National lately.

Ed Gaudet: Oh yeah. Nice.

Joel Klein: I like Death Cab for cutie.

Ed Gaudet: Oh, good. Yeah. Wilco. You like Wilco? Wilco fan?

Joel Klein: I don't know them, actually.

Ed Gaudet: Oh, Wilco is great. Yeah. Okay. Jeff Tweedy, it's.

Joel Klein: Well, so one of the great things about having kids is you listen to their stuff on the way to school, back when you drove them to school, and or you ride in the driver's seat when they're driving, and you need the car for the day, I'll listen to Hoosier or Eminem. Terrible. And I mean, okay, they're not great, but you diversify. Let's just put it that way.

Ed Gaudet: How about Noah Kahn? Has that hit your?

Joel Klein: Oh, man, you. Sounds like you got a good list that I should check out.

Ed Gaudet: Oh, I'll share some stuff with you.

Joel Klein: Yeah. No, please. I love that my. One of my favorite things to do on Friday is the Spotify release radar, where I get to see what comes out. And then Monday when you get the try this, I forget what it's called, it's called or something.

Ed Gaudet: So it's well, there's three of us are coming back from Vive, and we had a little bit of a commute in an Uber, and we were literally just each of us was picking a song and yeah, it was great. I learned a lot of new music. And so anyway, I'll share some of that afterwards.

Joel Klein: Oh please, love it.

Ed Gaudet: Go back in time, and you meet your 20-year-old self. What would you tell him?

Joel Klein: Lord. Yeah, I was pretty outspoken person in my 20s and 30s. If you went to meetings, whether it was about medicine or the air or even it, I was pretty sure I knew everything, and I wanted you to know that, and I, I didn't realize. That 50% of the things you're arguing about, you could just concede, and the universe is no different. I just didn't realize that. I didn't realize the idea of picking your fights a little bit more strategically. And you would I hear issues come up now, and I'll have this crocodile old part of my brain that wants to go to town, and then I but then I just realized that doesn't that a that's not your fight. B, don't worry about it. It doesn't matter. And it's maybe everybody has to go through that sort of passionate part of their life where they just react and then they you start to realize actually that doesn't matter. Or maybe it's just taking enough pitches, and you get enough at-bats that you realize what a pitch is going to do, and you react differently. So something about that, I.

Ed Gaudet: Think a lot of us went through that. Yeah, I know, I sure. And in some days, I'm still going through it. So I'm still yeah, still learning. Um, yeah. So this is the Risk Never Sleeps Podcast. I have to ask you this question. What's the riskiest thing you've ever done?

Joel Klein: The riskiest thing I've ever done.

Ed Gaudet: You're an ER doctor, so that's pretty risky.

Joel Klein: I'm a very risk-averse person. Actually, I think most doctor docs are we. We have this joke that when we see a patient, we start by assuming they're going to die, and then we work backward from there. It's this: all right, you're going to die. Maybe you're not going to die. All right. You're probably okay. I'm leaving like it's that progression of things. The riskiest thing I've ever done. I've never jumped out of an airplane. I'm probably not going to, um. Certainly making a career leap of faith again. My transition from patient care to it was very gradual. It wasn't like I quit my job and looked for a job for six months. It wasn't like that at all. In many ways, it was actually not risky. I am struggling to answer that question. Okay, I think I guess maybe if I'm being super honest with you, the riskiest thing probably I ever did involved the transition that I had to go through between college and medical school. My now wife, then girlfriend and I were we didn't know what was going to happen.



Joel Klein (cont'd): We keep dating all that. And I went back to Texas for medical school because it was \$5,000 a year, and it's where I got in. And she went off to Seattle for graduate school.

Ed Gaudet: Oh, wow.

Joel Klein: Yeah. And we didn't know what's going to happen? And so I had no money, and I was living in a highly questionable apartment and needed to go see her. So I would fly up there, and I was a master at getting cheap plane tickets, and I took a year off in the middle of medical school to just go and live with her for a year. And as I say that out loud, it's like, okay, that's lots of people do that. But at the time, oh my Lord, I remember.

Ed Gaudet: A lot of people do that, actually,

Joel Klein: The dean. Our dean at the school was like, you're going to do what? Yes. Sorry. Take a year off from medical. What are you going to do? You're going to forget everything. And how will you manage? Like you, they were very discouraging of it. And again, no money. I went up there and whatever. I worked in a clinic, and I got a master's degree, and I did a bunch of other stuff, and now we're married and I wish I had done more things like that. My wife and I talked about taking a year off before our respective graduate schools, and I didn't want to do it. I was too scared that, how are we going to pay for that. And I just didn't understand. It'll be fine. Like you're going to be fine. I didn't get that. And. That's definitely my biggest regret for sure.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah. Similarly, I wish I took some time off as well. Right. Plus, I had a military obligation. I was ROTC, so I had to fulfill that. Yeah. So okay, I'll ask you this question. We're almost out of time, but you're on a desert island. Movies or music, what would you? And you can only bring five movies or five albums with you. What would you bring?

Joel Klein: I guess I need a long one. So I'm a big Van Halen fan, so I probably bring their first album.



Ed Gaudet: Nice.

Joel Klein: That's just amazing.

Ed Gaudet: Eruption. Greats.

Joel Klein: Yeah.

Ed Gaudet: Great album.

Joel Klein: Yeah, one of the most influential movies for me was Silence of the lambs. It's one of the reasons I became a psych major, as crazy as that sounds. I loved The Shawshank Redemption. Get busy living or get busy dying. Yeah, that's right.

Ed Gaudet: That's it. It's that binary.

Joel Klein: That's damn right. That's an amazing movie. I'm a big Mark Knopfler fan, so maybe one of those double live album that he recorded with Dire Straits. If I get to, you know.

Ed Gaudet: Look what I have here.

Joel Klein: What is that?

Ed Gaudet: It's a broadcast collection from 79 to 92.

Joel Klein: Oh, that's the BBC thing.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah. It's fantastic.

Joel Klein: So they. So that's the second time they've released that is a great recording. It's that is super cool. If it's what I'm thinking it is, it's with Once Upon a Time in the West, it's the first song. Maybe if it is then if it's not, it's a different thing.

Ed Gaudet: So see. No, no, this is San Francisco.

Joel Klein: Oh, this is different. Yeah. Okay.

Ed Gaudet: Nine Sydney 86.

Joel Klein: And then this is when they were doing the. This is when they were okay. Yeah.

Ed Gaudet: I got down to the waterline. Water of love news lady.

Joel Klein: Oh, it is. Yeah. Okay. So yeah I think we might be talking about I think it might be the same recording. That's great it's amazing.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Joel Klein: I don't know. How many am I up to?

Ed Gaudet: You're good, you're good. It'd be.

Joel Klein: That sort of.

Ed Gaudet: Thing. Alchemy. Live alchemy.

Joel Klein: Yeah. That's the one I was. That's the.

Ed Gaudet: Double. That's fantastic. The hardest lesson in your career?

Joel Klein: There are things that happen to you. Whether you're in your ok or running a big operation. There will be these times when you think you're in deep trouble when you get the icy hand of death and Spira and your guy, you think you killed somebody by mistake, or you think you blew it, or you suddenly realize you have, I don't know, ransomware or whatever it is. And so the thing is, you've got to fall back on your training. You've got to breathe in and out. And if you need to, go outside and collect yourself. But when you're in charge, you got to rise up somehow, somehow, and we're all capable of it. And we don't realize that. And it's being able to just. Excuse me for just one second. Get yourself set. And go steel yourself and then you can do this.

Ed Gaudet: I love that answer. Yeah, that's a first. I love that answer. Advice to professionals going into cyber or going into healthcare.

Joel Klein: Go to the hospital, go to the go to where the care is being given spent. Just say, can I please watch? It's critical for two reasons. One, you'll realize the downstream impact of what you want to do, and it will connect you to why you can make way more money working for, I don't know, Lockheed Martin or something. Yeah, and if you want to, if you want to make the planet better, make the universe better, and you're working in this industry if you go and see it happen, you will feel, yeah, these are the people I'm helping. I'm part of this. And it's very powerful.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah. That connection to the business. Why am I here and really understand it's so important. So important.

Joel Klein: And you make friends because if they realize, wow, you're an IT guy. So is it really true that Iran or whatever and whatever. It's fine. You know.

Ed Gaudet: Could you come to my house and help me with my network?

Joel Klein: Yeah. Don't do. There's, um, you're as interesting to them as they are to you and. Friends are a good thing. Coffee is a good thing. Making. It's the connections that matter.



Ed Gaudet: Amen. Amen. This is Ed Gaudet from the Risk Never Sleeps Podcast. And if you're on the front lines, delivering patient care and protecting patient safety, remember to stay vigilant, because risk never sleeps.



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