

# Leader Profile



## Leader Profile:

**Charlotte S. Yeh,  
M.D., FACEP**

Chief Medical Officer

*AARP Services Incorporated  
(ASI)*

***“If we really want to transform the system, we need the physician, patient and payer to work in partnership.”***

***— Charlotte S. Yeh,  
M.D., FACEP***

## Transforming health care through relationships

After 20 years in emergency care, Charlotte S. Yeh, M.D., FACEP recalls the time that as the ER chief, she was confronted by the chief of cardiology, who came into her office fighting mad. The cardiology chief charged the hospital’s ER physician with failing to call in a cardiology consult for a 40-year-old victim of a massive heart attack. The ER physician admitted the patient minus the consult, focusing on quality of life, dignity and respect. While the consult would not have saved the patient, the cardiology chief felt it would have been a learning opportunity to save the next patient. “It was an example of innovation vs. compassion,” says Dr. Yeh. “Both were exceptional and responsible physicians and both were right.”

“We can become so polarized in the healthcare debate that we can’t see the options,” says Dr. Yeh who, as the new Chief Medical Officer (CMO) for AARP Services Inc. (ASI), sees opportunities to transform health care — and improve lives — every day. Transformation is possible, she says, if everyone in the healthcare enterprise is willing to share responsibility and work in partnership.

As the first ASI CMO, Dr. Yeh will develop those relationships on behalf of an organization with a 50-year history and 40 million members. “I don’t know anyone happy with health care right now,” she says. “If you want to create change, you can do it through government policy or the marketplace. AARP is known for its advocacy. Through ASI, it’s an opportunity to inform the marketplace and drive changes.”

ASI is the wholly-owned, taxable subsidiary of AARP. ASI manages the provider relationships for and performs quality control oversight of the wide range of products and services that carry the AARP name and are made available by independent providers for AARP’s almost 40 million members.

Dr. Yeh brings a clinical perspective to ASI. She will interact with medical officers representing the insurance companies that provide AARP-branded plans to identify programs and initiatives that lead to enhanced care for older adults. She’ll also work with the ASI Health Initiatives team to lead process improvement programs focused on quality, safety and efficiency.

Dr. Yeh credits ASI for making available products and services that focus on health improvement and transformation, ethical standards and social responsibility. She and the ASI team will collaborate to leverage the national influence of AARP to develop systems and processes that improve:

- Understanding of health care by addressing communication, literacy, cultural and translation issues
- Personal health by focusing on preventive care and effective management of chronic illnesses and working with caregivers on behalf of AARP members
- Community health by emphasizing access to care and eliminating disparities based on race, ethnicity, gender and social or economic status

***“Patients in the ER become a window to health policies that change lives such as access to preventive services or fastening seat belts.”***

***— Charlotte S. Yeh, M.D., FACEP***

With the emergency department as her training ground, Dr. Yeh developed a passion for setting priorities and developing systems amidst chaos. In a fishbowl-like environment, she witnessed firsthand when opportunities for policy changes — something as simple as fastening seat belts — made a huge difference in peoples’ lives. “Patients you see in the ER are a window into the successes or failures of health policies,” she says.

Dr. Yeh is well-versed in the power of policy changes. Prior to joining ASI, she was Regional Administrator for the Boston and New York Regional Offices for the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), where she helped promote CMS’ work to improve health care in New England. While at CMS, she directed local outreach to beneficiaries of the Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit, the largest expansion in Medicare’s 40-year history. More than 90 percent of seniors in the country now have drug coverage.

As the former medical director for Medicare policy at the National Heritage Insurance Company in Hingham, MA and before that, Physician-in-Chief for the Emergency Department at New England Medical Center in Boston, Dr. Yeh has a 360-degree perspective on health care. Furthermore, she has been active in the AMA, ACEP, AHA and other professional and advocacy groups, managed her own physician group and maneuvered the healthcare system as a patient. All of which led to Dr. Yeh’s role as a champion for change.

In large part, Dr. Yeh sees her role as a translator to bridge the gaps in what the physician, patient and payer understand and communicate about health care. “It’s important to recognize the powerful use of language and understand the meaning behind it,” she says, “and to customize communication to fit the audience. For example, the way in which health plans communicate with physicians must be different from how they communicate with patients.” Equally important, she says, “Remember the art of listening to consumers, our patients.”

With great expectations for the future of health care, Dr. Yeh understands the system’s evolution will not happen quickly. “In old China, families place big rocks in a pond, and eventually the water current erodes the rocks. Generations later, their children take the rocks and display them as beautiful garden sculptures. The lesson is it takes time,” she explains. “What we’re doing now is for us and for our next generation.”

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*Witt/Kieffer is proud to have consulted with the ASI on this important executive search assignment.*

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