

SHSMD26 CONNECTIONS

Health Care Marketing, Strategy & Communications

American Hospital Association Conference
September 27-29 ⚓ Baltimore

The seven deadly sins of healthcare marketing *(and how to repent before your audience leaves you behind)*

- **Christian Barnett**, Group Lead, Strategy and Creative, Unlock Health
- **Dan Lavelle**, VP, System Marketing, Geisinger



Agenda

- This vaguely humorous and aspiringly aspirational session will:
 1. Highlight some of the bad habits, acquired behaviors, and systemic missteps that contribute to some of the major issues in today's healthcare marketing
 2. Help attendees learn not just how to avoid the sins, but how to turn them into healthcare marketing virtues
 3. Provide simple hacks and shortcuts to get more value out of your marketing spend...instantly

**Expect uncomfortable truths, actionable strategies,
and a call to move from performance to purpose.**



**A special guest
and inspiration**



Pride

An excessive love of
one's own excellence



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JOHN DIAZ, MD, FACS

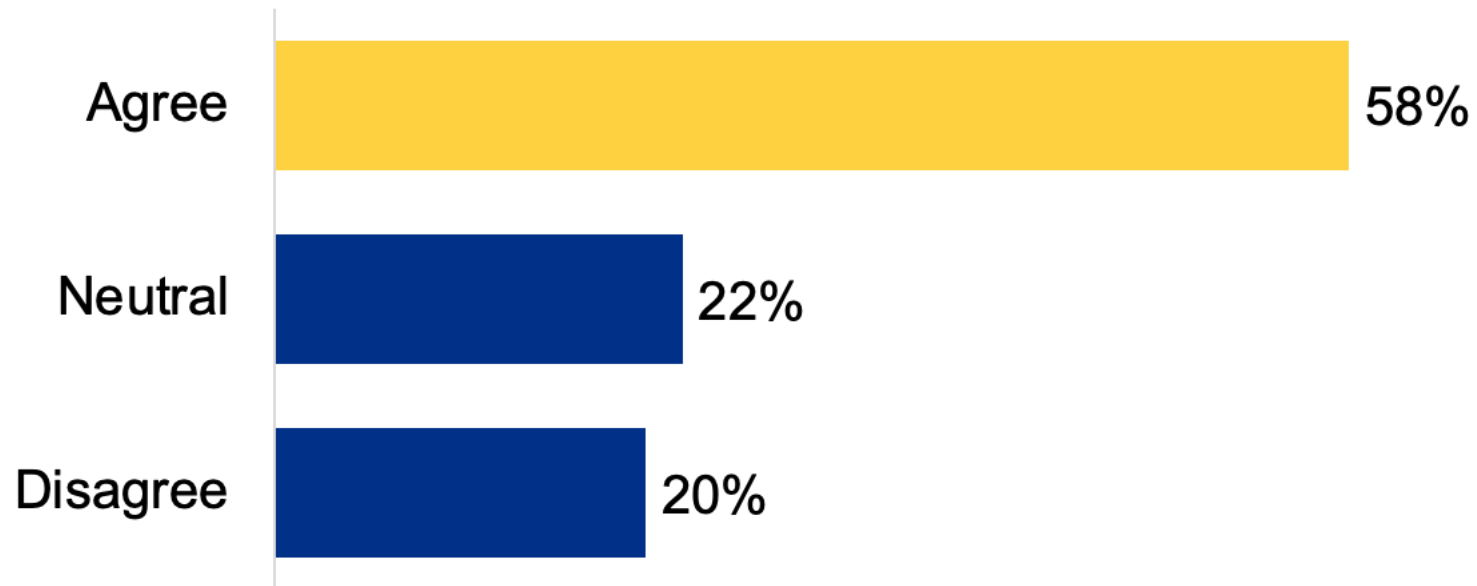
PLASTIC SURGERY EXCELLENCE

 @DrJohnDiaz | Beverly Hills



Consumers agree

Q. “These ads feel more like ego than helpful information”

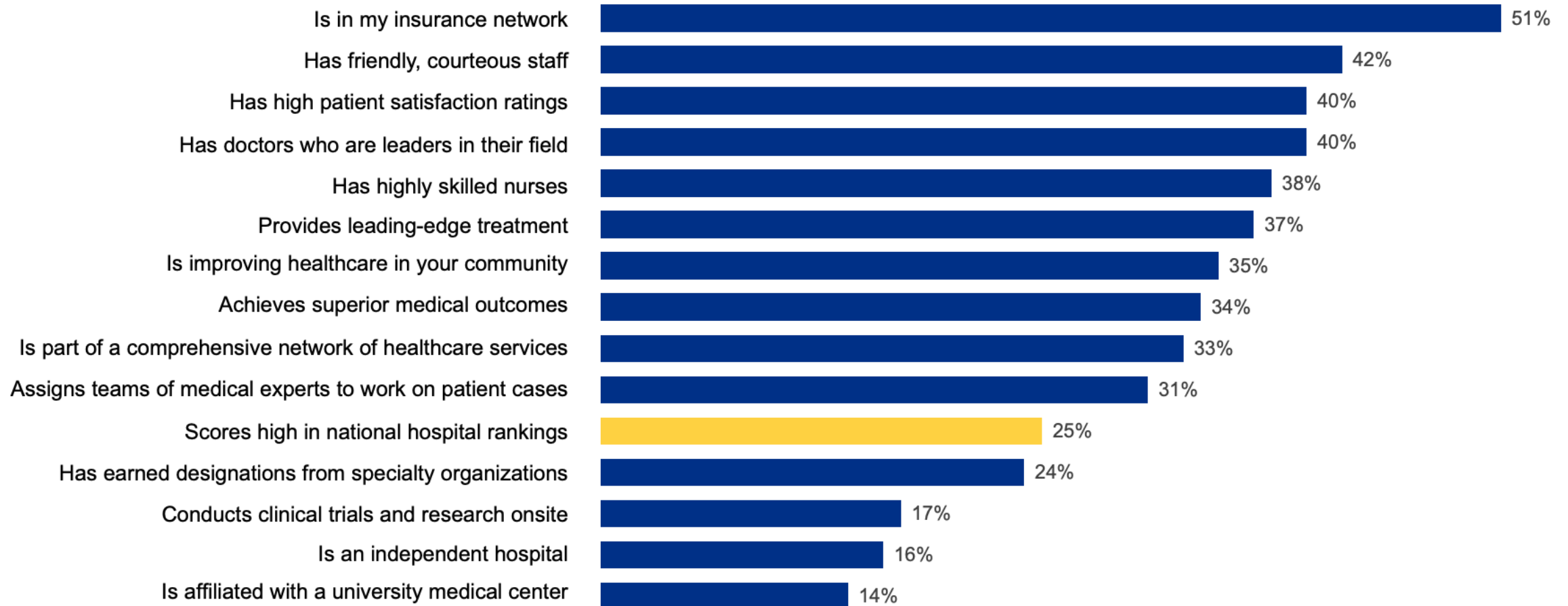


Source: Unlock national survey n= 450 March 2026

Mobile's Leading Award - Winning Hospital



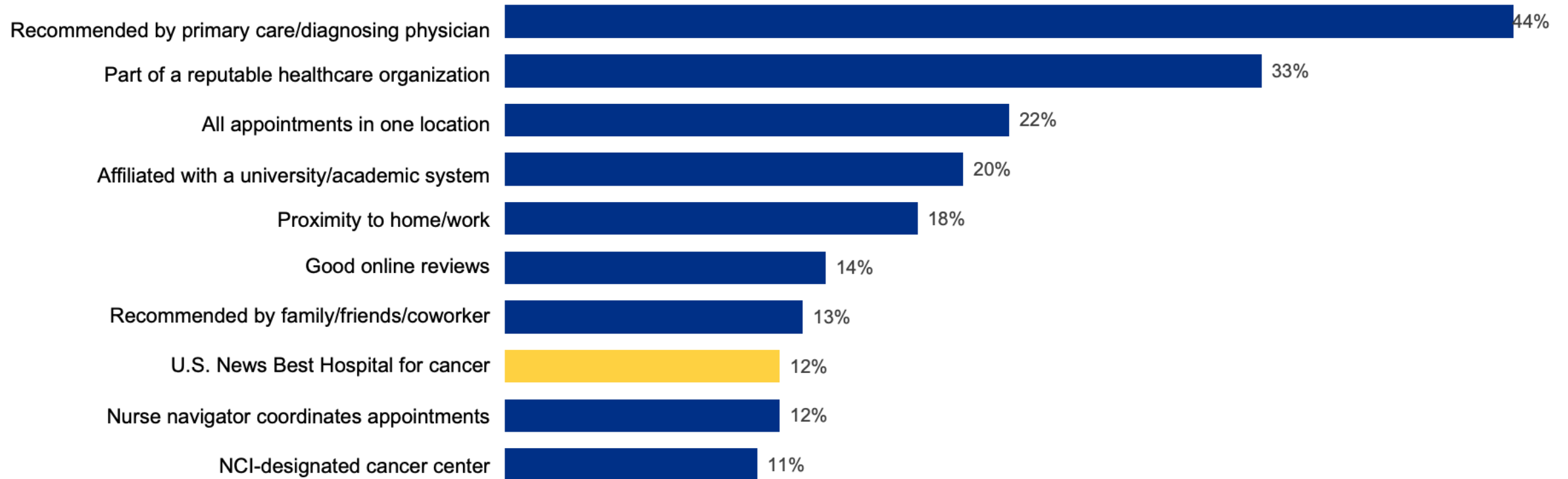
Rankings are not a big influencer of hospital choice



Q: If you had to choose a hospital or health system today, please indicate how essential each factor would be in helping you make your final selection.

Source: Unlock Consumer Compass, n=3003 Sept 2022 – March 2025

Nor a major driver in deciding cancer treatment



Q: When choosing where to be treated for your cancer diagnosis, which of the following helped to make you feel most confident in your decision?

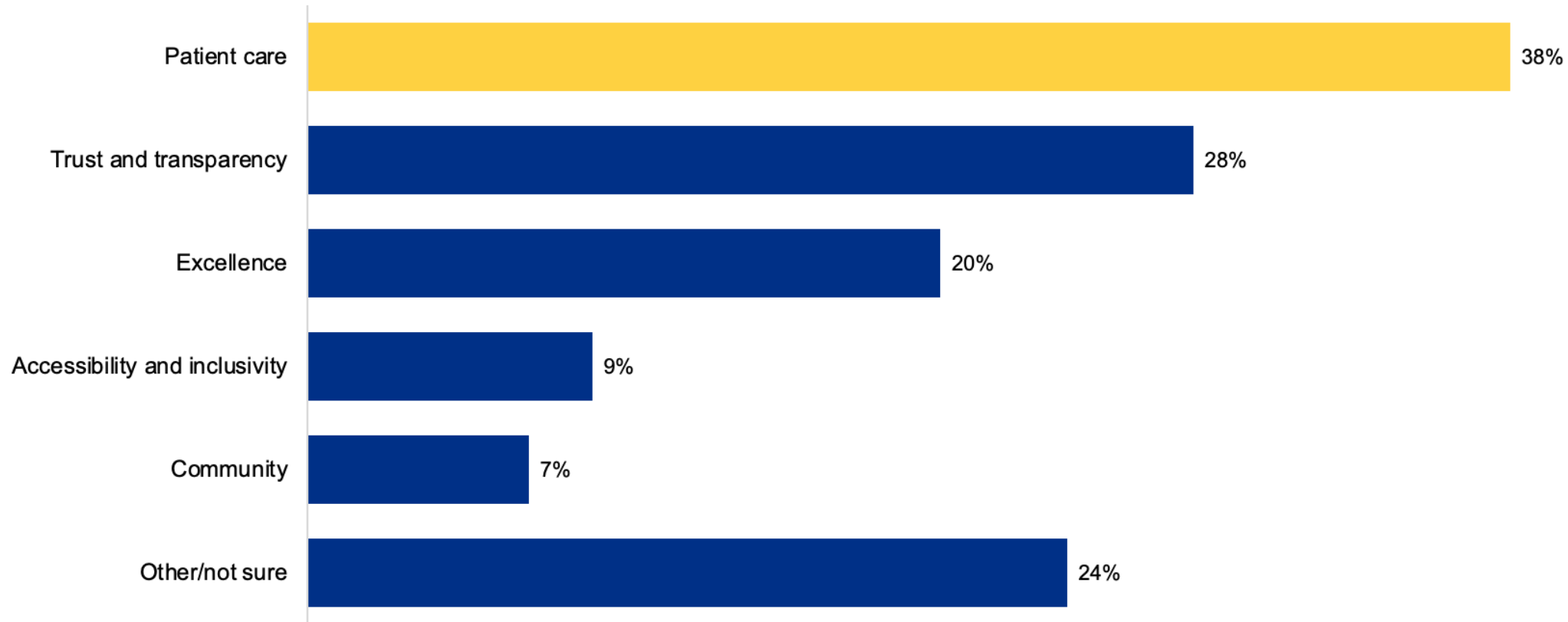
Source: Unlock Consumer Compass, n=850 Sept 2022 – March 2025



Humility

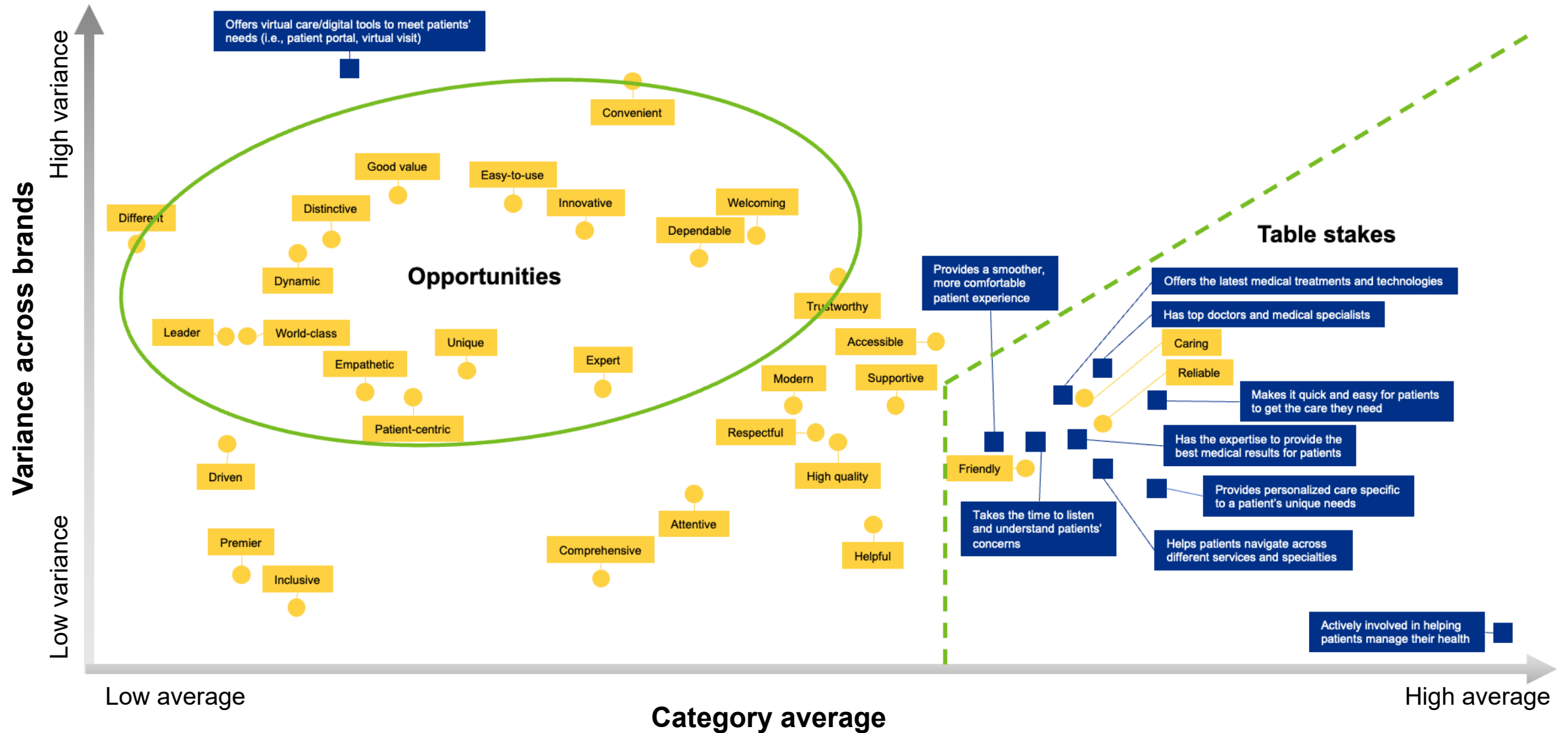
Thinking of those we serve
ahead of ourselves

What messaging does influence patient choice?



Q: And what would an authentic health system advertising message say to you? What would you expect to hear or read in an ad that would make you think... that was truly authentic what they said or promised? Source: Authenticity research by Klein & Partners for Unlock Health, n=1,000, May 2025

Humility can also be a differentiator





Lust

Intense, immoderate desire





Restraint

The discipline to fully utilize what you have before chasing what's new.

**Better performance comes from how
the system operates, not necessarily
from more tech.**

Epic





Greed

An insatiable desire for more

Respected. Ranked. Revolutionary. Right here.



Powered by new, cutting-edge technology, driven by innovative research, and delivered by expert doctors recognized by U.S. News & World Report, [Overclaim Health] brings world-class medicine to your neighborhood—with compassionate, community-based care you can feel.

From breakthrough discoveries to advanced treatments, our nationally ranked teams are redefining healthcare through our [Service Line] program, combining innovation, expertise, heart, and outcomes — all focused on you.

Advanced. Award-winning. Compassionate. Local. Comprehensive.
Schedule your appointment today at [website] or call [phone number].



Client brief 2026

“When it matters most, XZY delivers fast, compassionate emergency care, right here in your community.

(...and physician-forward storytelling...)”

Client brief 2025

“Prospective cancer patients”

Geisinger brief 2024

The target audience is men and women ages 18-64 in our primary service area.



Discipline

The prioritization of fewer, more impactful efforts. The art of self control.

“Get users of The Old Hospital to consider The New Hospital Medical Center for care.”

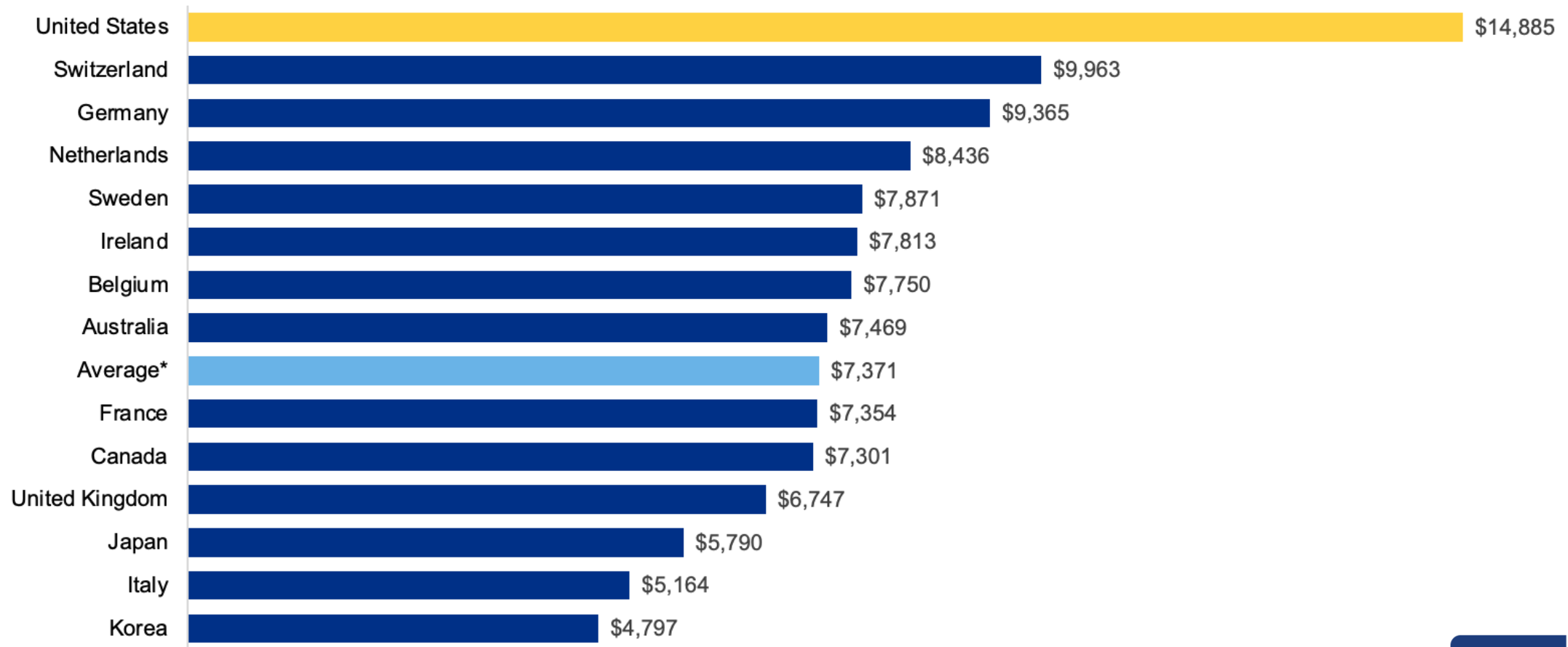
“Increase preference for service line X
at The Expert Hospital amongst women
45-65 in the xyz area.”



Gluttony

Over-consumption to the point of waste

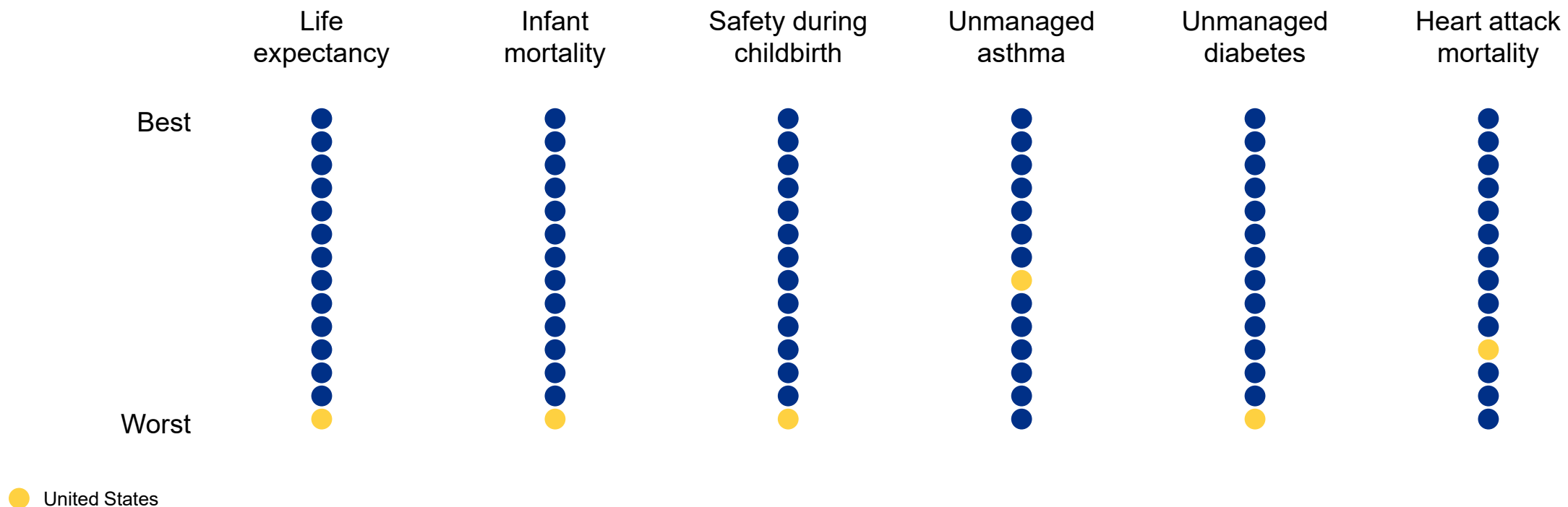
U.S. healthcare spending per capita is twice the average of other wealthy countries



* Average does not include the United States

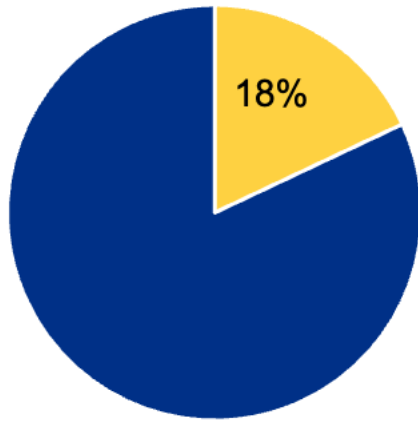
Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development via Peter G. Peterson Foundation, data from 2024

And the U.S. has worse health outcomes compared to other wealthy countries

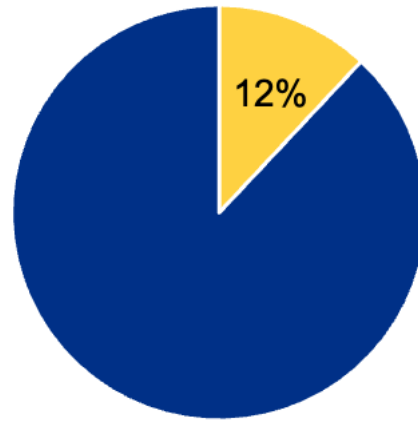


Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development via Peter G. Peterson Foundation, data from 2023 or latest available

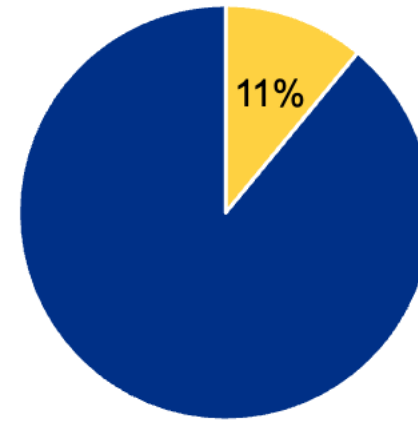
U.S. healthcare 18% of GDP in 2024



United States



Germany
Switzerland
France

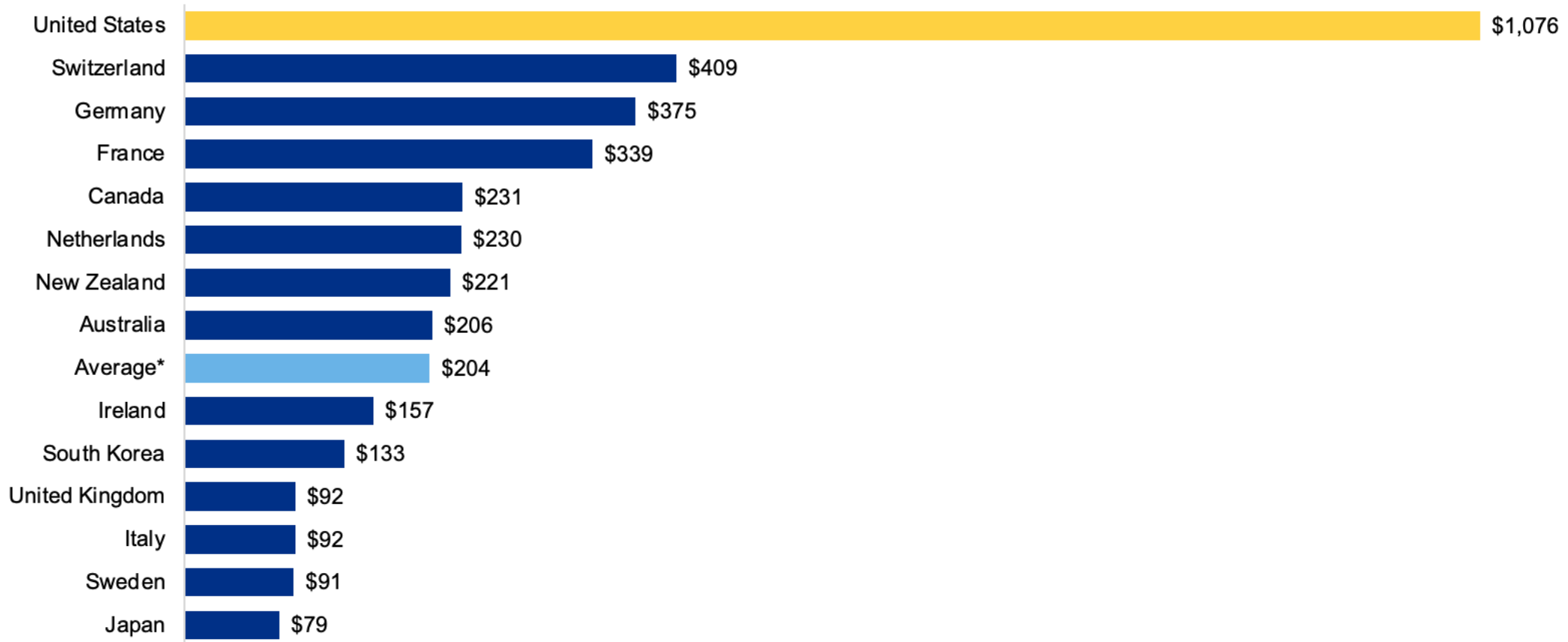


Sweden
Canada
United Kingdom
Belgium
Japan

Australia & Netherlands – 10%
Italy & Korea – 8%
Ireland – 7%

Sources: Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services National Health Expenditures Fact Sheet, updated January 2026, OECD.org. Health at a Glance 2025. Health expenditure in relation to GDP.

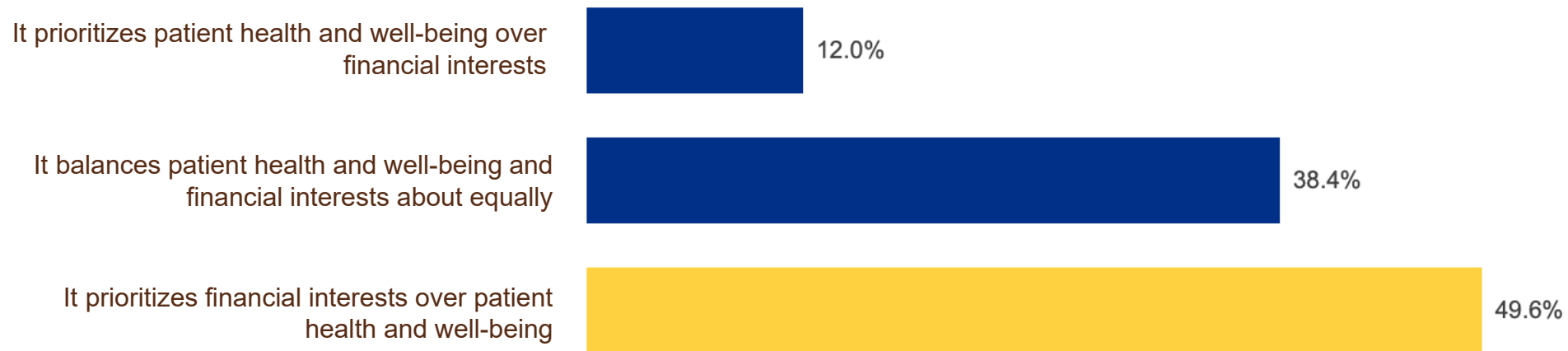
U.S. spending on healthcare administration higher per capita compared to other wealthy countries



* Average does not include the U.S.

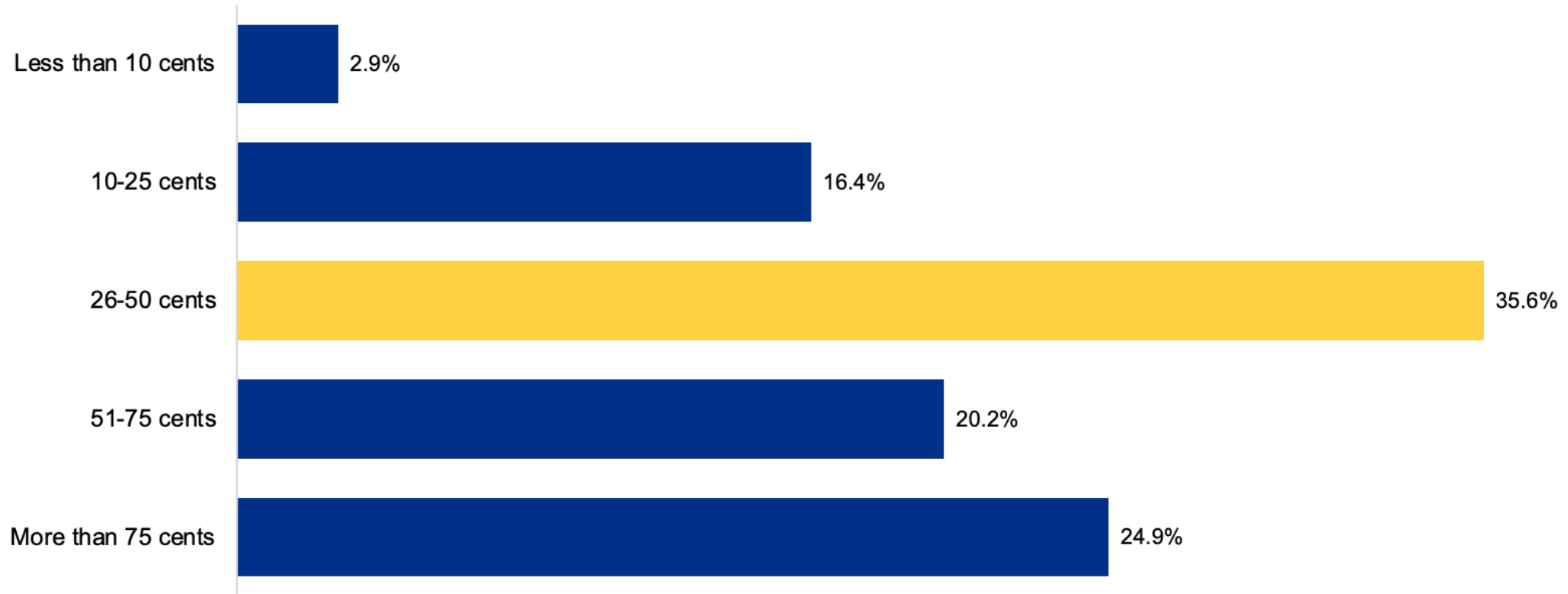
Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development via Peter G. Peterson Foundation, data most recent values up to 2023 (most recent data available from the U.S.)

Consumers are skeptical about motives



Q: Which of the following best describes your view of the U.S. healthcare system?
Source: Unlock national survey n= 450 March 2026

Consumers believe the system is wasteful



Q: In your opinion, how much of every dollar spent in the U.S. healthcare system is wasted on things that don't directly improve patient health?
Source: Unlock national survey n= 450 March 2026



Stewardship

The intentional and responsible allocation of resources toward meaningful outcomes

**Reframe marketing communications
as an instrument of healthcare.**

From

Inpatient and downstream

Hospital centered

Blanket campaigns

Episodic campaigns

Success is what ***has*** happened



To

Outpatient care and behavior change

Community and primary care centric

Personalized, proactive engagement

“Always on”

More of what ***hasn't*** happened



Envy

A malicious drive to possess what another has

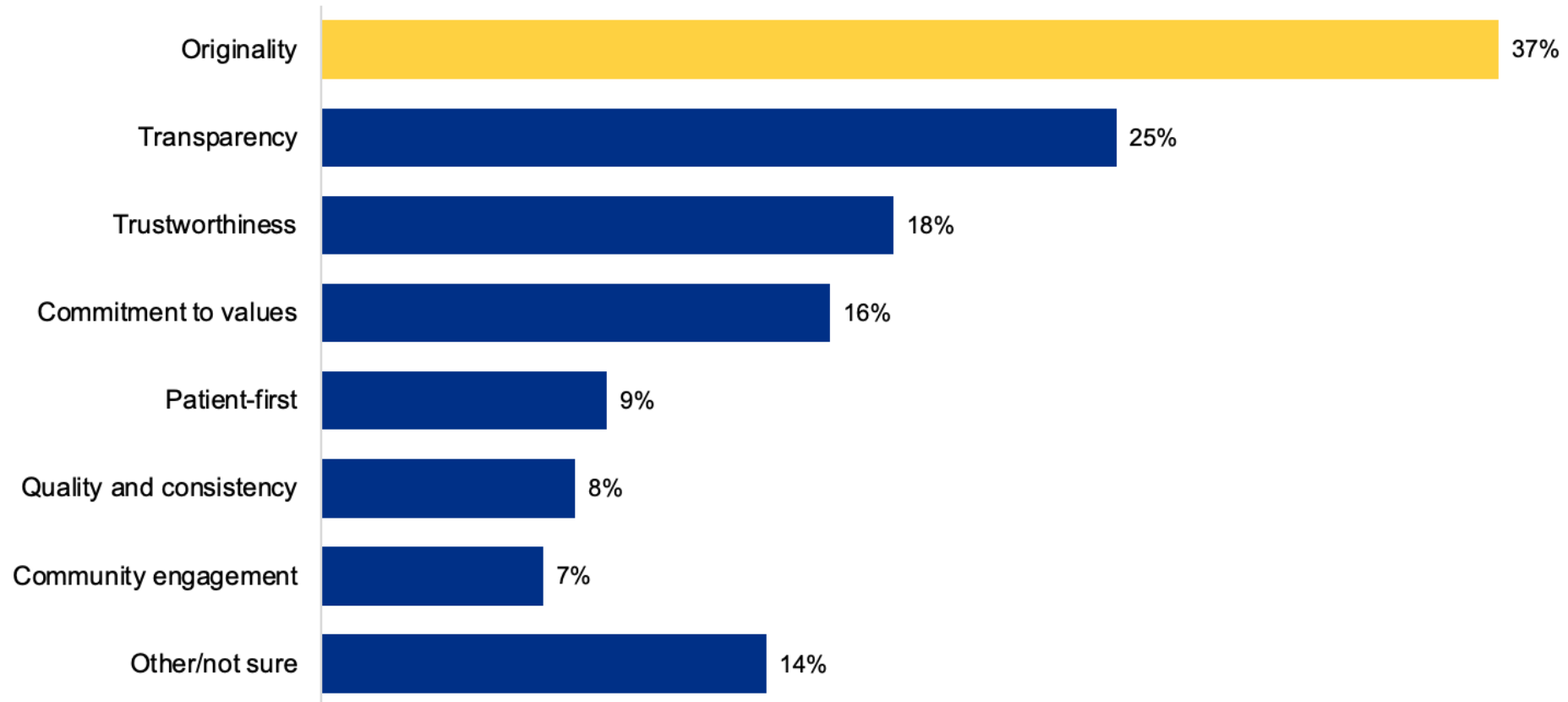




Distinction

The commitment to
express what makes you
uniquely valuable

Authentic companies are seen as original, unique, and not imitating others



Q: If a company is truly “authentic,” what does that mean to you?

Source: Authenticity research by Klein & Partners for Unlock Health, n=1,000, May 2025

**A brand's relative uniqueness
is valuable for consumers.**

Differentiation vs. Distinctiveness



Wrath

Acting on intense anger
without reason or thought
for consequences

64%

of CMOs say their top challenge is proving marketing value



Source: Deloitte 2025 CMO Survey



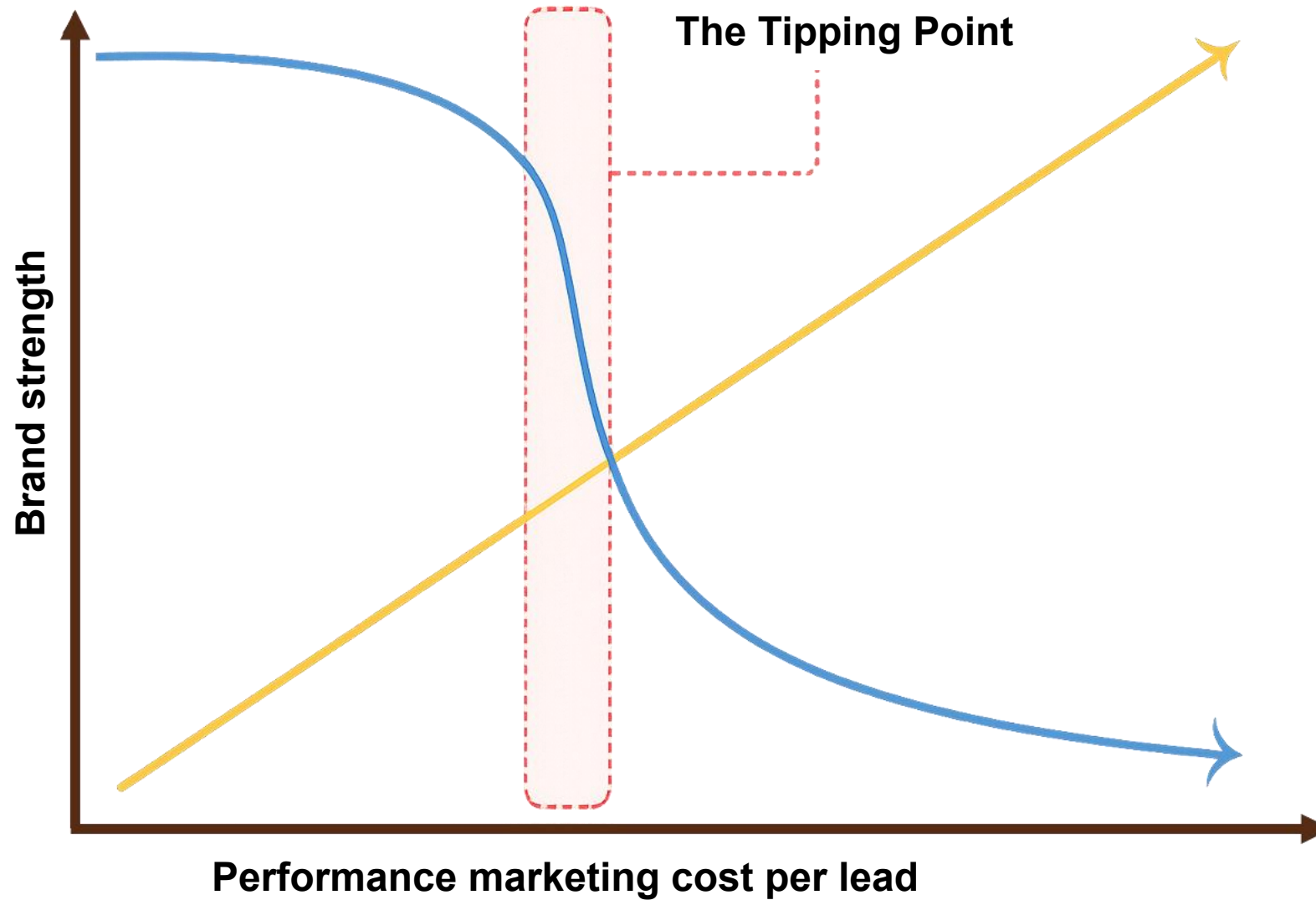
Prudence

Thoughtful, measured decision-making
grounded in long-term impact

Marketing as an investment

But be careful with marketing ROI

The Tipping Point





Sloth

Profound apathy and willful negligence

Business objectives

“Make two videos.”

“Increase awareness.”

“Increase awareness...and drive volume.”



Intentional effort guided by clear objectives and accountability

Get _____ to _____ by _____

Get men aged 50+ to get a heart screening by...

1. showing how much they are loved by others
2. showing how much there is to achieve in life
3. showing the stats that show people who have screenings live longer and have have better quality of life



Our bonus sin



Timidity

Shrinking from bold action
out of fear, caution or lack
of confidence

71%

Say most healthcare ads look and feel the same to me

83%

Say healthcare advertising is boring, or don't care about it

78%

Can't think of a specific healthcare ad that stuck or made an impression



WeCare





Courage

The willingness to take bold, differentiated action despite uncertainty



Three key take-aways

1. Replace self-centered claims with audience-centered messaging rooted in humility, authenticity, and trust.
2. Use sharper briefs, clearer objectives, and disciplined prioritization to make marketing more focused, measurable, and effective.
3. Treat marketing as a strategic instrument of healthcare by investing in behavior change, stewardship, and distinctive creative work.



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Questions?

Please be sure to complete the session evaluation on the mobile app!



Your Dandy Devil

Christian Barnett

Group Lead, Strategy and Creative
Unlock Health | christian.barnett@unlockhealthnow.com

Christian has decades of experience leading creative and strategy not only for top health systems, but also for some of the biggest consumer brands out there.

He is known for his mantra of “ideas before advertising, ideas after advertising” and pushing clients to strive for big impact, delivering ideas and community activations that help hospitals rival top consumer brands in engagement and memorability.



The angelic voice of reason

Dan Lavelle

VP, System Marketing
Geisinger| djlavelle1@geisinger.edu

Dan is a healthcare marketing executive with over a decade of experience in brand strategy, performance marketing, digital transformation, and product leadership across B2B and B2C.

At Geisinger, Dan drives the vision and execution of Geisinger's brand strategy and leads marketing for its clinical enterprise, health plan, and college of health sciences. His mission: to redefine the status quo in healthcare marketing — making it the voice of consumers and a catalyst for change.

