

[Dr. Thomas Parry, Integrated Benefits Visionary, Retires](#)



Dr. Thomas Parry, Integrated Benefits Institute Visionary

Dr. Thomas Parry, integrated benefits visionary and president of the [Integrated Benefits Institute](#) (IBI), will be retiring on April 1. IBI's new president will be [Chris McSwain](#).

I got to know Tom in 1995 when he and [Bill](#) Molmen left the [California Workers Compensation Institute](#) (a forerunner to the [Workers' Compensation Research Institute](#)) to start IBI. As a national, full-time workers' compensation reporter, I found IBI fun to cover due to its refreshing thought leadership.

To appreciate the impact of IBI, it's important to understand what was taking place when it began. In the mid-1990s, employers and insurers had not yet realized that managed care was not saving money nor effectively helping people heal faster. IBI started soon after lawmakers rejected [President Bill Clinton's "24-Hour" health care](#) coverage.

Since lawmakers lacked the appetite for 24-Hour coverage, Tom and Bill had a different idea: why not encourage employers to voluntarily integrate benefits, such as workers' compensation, non-occupational disability coverage and group health? After all, the challenges were the same: when an employee was absent, employers faced productivity challenges. Further, employees are better off financially when they heal more quickly.

The idea made a lot of sense. As Tom explained to me, the human body needs the best treatment regardless of why an injury occurred, so why should siloed benefit structures get in the way?

Tom had the vision to change the way employers think about health care and disability and the courage to start an organization to get the ball rolling. IBI conducted some groundbreaking research in the mid-1990s offering conclusions now taken for granted. One of my favorite studies showed that

people with the same injuries were treated differently on workers' comp compared to group health insurance. Since workers' compensation is concerned with disability costs and return-to-work, it offers a sports medicine approach to hasten recovery. This was certainly not the case for group health insurance.

It has been my pleasure to witness not only the growth of IBI, but also its sphere of influence. Since its inception, progressive integrated benefit experimentation has evolved into employer best practices. Benefit integration still has a way to go, but if it were not for Tom and Bill, it might have never gained traction. Today, IBI has 1,240 corporate sponsors and two-thirds of them are Fortune 100 employers.

Annamarie: Please share some personal info people do not know about you.

Tom: I have been married for 37 years and have two sons: one is responsible for all of IBI benchmarking data and programs, and the other has his Ph.D. in biochemistry/molecular biology and works at a large law firm in their intellectual property group. I have been an avid fly fisherman since my early teenage years and have had the opportunity fish all over the western United States and the world, including Russia, New Zealand, Chile, Argentina and Canada. I recently got back from Tanzania where my wife and I went on a two-week wildlife safari.

Annamarie: Why did you start IBI?

Tom: Alex Swedlow, now the President of CWCI, Bill, who was the organization's general counsel and I did some of the early work comparing medical delivery in group health and workers' compensation in California. We found that medical care delivery differs depending on if the injury or illness occurred at work or not.

That made no sense to me since, to both employers and employees, it is important to get the best care and get back to work expeditiously. At that point, my interests broadened. I wanted to address the question, "What are the best strategies to get employees care and return to work, regardless of where their condition occurs?" That led to the founding of IBI.

Annamarie: How have integrated benefits grown and evolved since you started IBI?

Tom: In the early days, the focus was on the integration of disability across occupational and non-occupational settings. From there, the conversation broadened into total absence management. Then the question of how group health fit into the equation emerged and employee "health and productivity" became the focus.

Today, much of IBI's work focuses on the relationship between workforce health and business performance — analyzing both the total bottom-line costs and the top-line value of health.

Annamarie: What challenges do employers still face when pursuing integrated benefits? How common has benefit integration become?

Tom: Initially, the discussion was about creating a single organizational unit to manage all health related benefits. Not surprisingly, there were significant roadblocks with that approach. Not the least of which was the organizational politics across programs and the very different risk financing mechanisms for each. Today the focus is far more on the integration of data and looking for leverage points to improve experience.

For example, those in risk management have always utilized safety and return to work as their leverage points to improve workers' compensation experience. However, a growing body of research

tells us that the underlying health status of the employee influences incidence, duration and cost. At the same time, on the benefits side of the house, people managing wellness are looking for the payoff of what they do beyond medical care expense. They are finding that healthier employees miss less work and have fewer disability incidents.

Annmarie: What are your retirement plans?

Tom: I am blessed to have a new (and first) granddaughter; my wife and I will help take care of her on a part-time basis (at one point in my younger life I thought I might become a pediatrician, so this is perfect). I also will participate in a program sponsored by our church to tutor low-income students in the Oakland school system in reading and math. I will travel and try to get in some more fly-fishing time along the way.

Annmarie: Anything else you would like to add?

Tom: Never in my wildest dreams, when Bill Molmen and I walked into 525 Market Street in San Francisco on the first day of IBI in 1995, did I think 22 years later I would be still running this organization and have the great fortune of working with so many thought-leading companies and people. I'm proud of what we have accomplished at IBI over these decades but nothing can replace the wonderful people I have worked with and the great friends I have made over the years.

Annmarie: Thanks so much!

Tom: Thanks for all of your work over the years on our issue. You have been a great supporter.