



Julie Jacono

Why Not Me? Why Not Now? Picture this: It's July 4, 2024. While most Americans are enjoying barbecues and fireworks, **Julie Jacono** is waiting for something entirely different—the signing of health care legislation that would change everything. When the bill was finally signed that Independence Day, Jacono knew it was now or never. By the following week, she had resigned from her position at a venture fund to launch Opus Health, a company positioned to save hospitals across America from potential closure.

The Perfect Storm in Health Care. Jacono's pivot wasn't born from entrepreneurial restlessness—it was driven by urgent market reality. Having spent her career in health care before moving to venture capital, she had a unique vantage point to see the crisis brewing. As chief strategy and information innovation officer for MetroHealth System, she witnessed firsthand the operational inefficiencies plaguing hospitals. Later, as a venture capitalist reviewing healthtech deals, she saw brilliant innovations that would struggle to reach the market because the target customers—hospitals—were in no shape to receive them.

The new health care legislation creates a particularly acute problem: It forces massive change in an enormously intractable industry in just 16 months, removing 6%–8% of operating margin from hospitals overnight starting Jan. 2027. For context, most hospitals survive on 1%–2% operating margin. Losing 6%–8% means they would lose four to six times their annual profit immediately.

The Billion-Dollar Solution. The crisis Jacono identified is also an enormous opportunity. Now, 18% of US GDP is spent on hospitals and health care—an unsustainable figure. More tellingly, 25 cents of every dollar a hospital spends goes to administrative functions. Most hospitals handle these functions themselves, and as Jacono puts it bluntly, "They do them poorly." Her solution is elegant in its simplicity: Leverage existing infrastructure at a massive scale. Jacono negotiated rights to a multitenant platform originally created by a large entity for its own administrative outsourcing needs. This platform is backed by 11,000 employees who perform these functions daily for a \$22-billion organization.

The venture, now branded as Opus Health ("Operations with us, by us"), reflects the collaborative nature of the solution. Small to medium hospitals at risk of not surviving can contribute 5% to 15% of their costs to receive a guaranteed 20% savings through the consortium model. What makes Opus Health different from a typical venture-backed startup is its risk profile and immediate scale. "The first contract is \$60 million a year, and it's a guaranteed five years. So, a potential total contract value of \$300 million," Jacono explains.

The model combines global delivery capabilities for immediate cost savings, AI, automation applied to "mind-numbing administrative" tasks that don't require creativity, and proven scale through an existing platform serving a \$22 billion organization. While everyone in health care

understands AI must play a role, "they have no freaking idea what to do," Jacono notes. Hospitals lack the people, capital, and know-how to implement AI solutions effectively. Opus Health's "function as a service" model eliminates these concerns by providing guaranteed outcomes without requiring hospitals to buy technology or find specialized talent.

The Harvard AMP Difference. Both **Natalie Schneider** and **Julie Jacono** credit Harvard's Advanced Management Program with providing the confidence and framework to tackle such ambitious challenges. **Schneider** notes that "AMP helped me see my own capabilities more clearly while also highlighting areas where I could grow. It gave me a broader lens to assess not just what I was doing well but how I could contribute more effectively."

For **Jacono**, AMP created a fundamental mindset shift. "I have zero doubt. Since we graduated, there hasn't been a time when I've looked at something and said there isn't a way for me to solve this. I didn't have that wherewithal beforehand." Being surrounded by 150 exceptional people from around the world created lasting confidence: "You look around and you realize you belong here. So, then all of a sudden, you go into these other circumstances and say, 'Why not me? Why not now? Why not this?'" This confidence enabled Jacono to make seemingly impossible asks, like requesting a billion-dollar investment contribution from an established organization for her startup. "And they said yes. I mean, who in a million years would ask for that? But I'm like, well, why not me?"

Beyond Profit to Purpose. Both entrepreneurs embody what **Jacono** observed during her venture capital days: "Female founders led with passion, and male founders led with profit." For Jacono, the most compelling aspect of Opus Health isn't just the business opportunity—it's preventing hospital closures that would devastate communities. "When a hospital closes, a town dies," she emphasizes. For **Schneider**, success isn't just measured in funding rounds closed or valuations achieved—it's about creating a system where the best ideas get funded regardless of who's behind them.

Looking Forward. As these two Harvard AMP alumni continue building their respective solutions, they represent a new model of entrepreneurship—one that combines deep industry expertise, strategic market timing, and the confidence to tackle seemingly intractable problems at massive scale. **Schneider** is systematically changing how health care founders access capital, while **Jacono** is restructuring how hospitals operate to ensure their survival. Their stories demonstrate that the biggest opportunities often emerge from the most entrenched challenges. In health care—an industry that touches every American life—that kind of bold, purpose-driven leadership has never been more critical.