

# Greenwich Time

## A commitment to excellence will never change at Greenwich Hospital

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By Frank A. Corvino

Day after day, we read about staff reductions and budget cuts in corporations and businesses, as America grapples with the so-called Great Recession. But healthcare, unlike other industries, must maintain excellence even as the nation tries to emerge from the worst economic downturn in 80 years and lawmakers grapple with reform.

This challenge is made difficult because many hospitals have had to confront declining revenue and patient volume.

For any company or organization, cost-cutting is an enervating ordeal that requires you to reassess what you do, change the way you do it and determine how you can continue to do it well amid economic adversity.

The world changed for all of us when the bottom fell out of the economy. Greenwich Hospital confronted one of the most challenging times in its history, but it gave us an opportunity to make positive changes. From the outset, we recognized three areas can never be compromised: patient care, service excellence and safety.

Over the summer, we took steps to ensure our financial viability and still uphold our commitment to high-quality, safe patient care. As a result of our efforts, which included expense reductions of \$20 million, we posted a net operating gain of \$10.8 million for fiscal year 2009.

What was destined to be our worst year ever turned out to be a very, very strong year - one of our best years. In addition, we were able to rehire some of the employees we let go and have seen an increase in patient volume.

During a comprehensive 15-week review of our organization, we identified system improvements that enhanced nursing care, patient safety and customer service.

A streamlined documentation process and workflow changes we instituted will enable nurses to spend more time at the bedside, delivering the same high-quality care with a more personalized approach. Nurses now also carry spectralink phones to receive direct-dialed calls, so that physicians can reach nurses directly.

Other organizational improvements included cross-training of OR paramedical assistants; enhancements to the Emergency Department triage process; staffing pattern changes in Radiology to meet demands; and improved customer service in Central Scheduling.

Greenwich Hospital is among the top one percent of all hospitals nationally for patient satisfaction. We rely on the independent organization Press Ganey to conduct regular surveys on patient satisfaction, which provide us with a rating and a matrix for improvement.

Each year, we receive almost 12,000 surveys from patients in four areas, inpatient, outpatient, emergency room and ambulatory care, and since 2000, we have ranked in the 98th or 99th percentile in most categories. We read every survey, we sort them and make sure the information they contain goes to the appropriate people. As a follow-up, we call the patients to let them know we've heard what they had to say.

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We have also initiated a campaign to become the safest hospital in America, and we don't think that cause is overly ambitious. We can do; we will do it.

Admittedly, there will also be challenges in the years ahead as hospitals nationwide confront the prospect of decreased reimbursement from managed-care plans and government programs.

Nevertheless, the key to excellence is to strive for constant improvement at all levels and in all departments. Be assured, we will never sacrifice safety, excellent care and patient satisfaction.

Frank A. Corvino is president and CEO of Greenwich Hospital and chairman of the Eisenhower Strategy Forum on Aging in America.

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