

Washington Healthcare News

wahcnews.com

Articles, Interviews and Statistics for the Healthcare Executive

VOLUME 3, ISSUE 12

DECEMBER 2008

Stevens Hospital: Not So Typical and Rather Remarkable

By Mike Carter
*CEO and President
Stevens Hospital*



Stevens Hospital is located just north of Seattle in Edmonds, Washington. Like many Washington State hospitals, the competitive issues facing Stevens are different than those faced by hospitals in other parts of the country. We are the only hospital in our primary service area and provide services to a population of about 500,000. This competitive environment is much different than my prior Orange County, California hospital where thirty hospitals provided services to a population of about 3,000,000.

Stevens Hospital is meeting significant challenges, involving a wide range of issues and opportunities that currently face the majority of Washington's acute care community hospitals. Patient satisfaction, access to healthcare services and

quality of care frequently compete with financial performance, access to capital and retention and recruitment of physicians and staff for the attention of senior leadership.

Urban public hospitals, like Stevens, are particularly challenged by substantial, well financed competitors, an unfavorable payer mix, and an ever increasing demand for emergency services.

Our story is easily translatable in many community hospital settings throughout Washington State.

Mr. "Fix-it"

When I arrived at Stevens Hospital two and a half years ago, the organization was transitioning from a two-year financial turnaround engagement managed by Wellspring Partners, LLC. Prior to the arrival of this well known turnaround team, Stevens had experienced a decade of marginal financial performance including a long history of unprofitability.

Upon assuming the position of CEO and President I was labeled "Mr. Fix-it" by the Seattle media. While the label may not be totally accurate we have managed to establish a record of clinical achievement and financial performance. We have developed strategies and a series of business plans that were designed to turn the significant challenges faced by Stevens into solid opportunities to focus on bolstering patient volumes and im-

prove and expand the development of specific service lines.

These initiatives have included expediting processes and throughput in the emergency department (ED) and the critical care continuum, enhancing revenue, accelerating collections, and controlling expenditures.

In aggressively pursuing appropriate hospitality programs, we've joined a cadre of Washington hospital administrators who are diligently at work to make their hospitals attractive and welcome settings for physicians and patients alike.

Leadership Attributes and Communication

Key to our turnaround has been building trust among our employees and physicians. Our senior leadership team communicates in a consistent and timely manner. We are moving forward in a positive direction and truthful and forthright communication is key to building a reputation for integrity and earning trust.

We implemented a comprehensive plan to improve communication between leaders and employees. One of the programs we have implemented to improve communication is called "Open Mike". Each quarter my senior staff and I meet with a group of about 700 employees to discuss pertinent issues. These sessions are highly

interactive and at the end of the meeting a twenty minute “no holds barred” session follows.

We survey our employees each year and ask them, among other things, how happy they are. We have tracked this over the years and see significant improvement. The year I arrived at Stevens only 4% of employees reported being happy working for Stevens. Last year this figure jumped to 60% and this year we expect it to rise again. The surveys show there is a direct correlation to those attending the “Open Mike” meetings and their happiness working at Stevens. Attending employees ranked the trustworthiness of our hospital’s leadership at 79% while employees who did not attend ranked us at 30%. The numbers are important because it shows that the people attending Open Mike are aware of what is going on and those that don’t attend gather their information through rumors and innuendo. I believe this is why they are unsatisfied in their jobs and shows the power of open and honest communication.

Achieving the Gold Standard – Sound Testimony

One of several examples of Stevens’ expanded clinical prowess is the Coronary Artery Disease Gold Performance Achievement recently awarded by the American Heart Association’s Get with the Guidelines program. The award recognized our commitment and success in implementing a higher standard of cardiac care that effectively improves treatment of patients hospitalized with coronary artery disease.

As the first hospital in Washington State to receive this award, our Hospital demonstrated over a period of 24 consecutive months that

at least 85 percent of its eligible coronary patients (without contraindications) are discharged following the American Heart Association’s recommended treatment guidelines. Patients are started on aggressive risk reduction therapies such as cholesterol-lowering drugs, aspirin, ACE inhibitors and beta-blockers in the hospital and receive smoking cessation/weight management counseling as well as referrals for cardiac rehabilitation before they are discharged.

We are dedicated to making our cardiac unit among the best in the country, and the American Heart Association’s Get with the Guidelines program is helping us accomplish that by making it easier for our professionals to improve the long-term outcomes of our cardiac patients.

As a community needs driven organization, our services directly reflect the demands of our residents. Our cardiology team, led by Swedish Heart and Vascular Institute cardiologists, performs up to 80 emergent angioplasties and diagnostic procedures each month. We are hoping to double that number in the coming years. Under recently adopted DOH regulations, we are applying for a Certificate of Need in December 2008, which will further support our future plans to build a second cath lab and perform elective angioplasties. When someone is having a heart attack, time is of the essence, and as the only hospital within a substantial radius, it’s important that we’re equipped to handle the situation. It is a sound indication of our ability to move forward and respond in stellar fashion to the needs of the community. The standard of care evidenced in the AHA’s recognition of the quality of our cardiol-

ogy program is embodied in our approach to the delivery all of the services available at Stevens.

One of the other major initiatives we have undertaken has been our approach to helping our hospital staff improve and refine their management skills. We retained The Studer Group, a management consulting firm to set up the Stevens Leadership Development Institute. About 75 employees in leadership positions travel offsite to develop their day to day management skills with a heavy emphasis on communication, accountability, measured performance and behavioral standards.

The Studer program establishes goals, assigns responsibility, and measures progress. We have seen this program energize our organization and get our staff on the same page to work toward common goals.

A critical component of our management strategy has also involved the retention of Press Ganey, a national consulting firm. This engagement has been fostered, in part, by the firm’s engagement by most of the Puget Sound Region hospitals. Recognizing the value of peer group comparisons, we’ve used Press Ganey data to augment the Studer program and develop an intensive system of comparative analytics, accountability, and measurement. These feature the use of a monthly reporting tool to drive the implementation of Stevens’ patient satisfaction strategies.

We are now enthusiastic about the future of our hospital. While we are not overwhelmed with financial capital we do spend five to six million each year on renovations and upgrades. Now that we have a steady foundation we’re ready to grow.