



SPREADING OUR STORIES

As promised in the Editor's Note, Nov.-Dec. 2010, *Health Progress* will continue to publish vignettes about creative ways of communicating mission.

Mission Statement Points the Way

BY BART RODRIGUES, M.Div., M.A., M.B.A.

In the classic story by Lewis Carroll, Alice asks the Cheshire Cat for advice about which way to go. The cat astutely observes that it really doesn't matter, if she doesn't care where she gets. The encounter during Alice's journey to Wonderland has been popularized in this familiar expression: "If you don't know where you're going, any road will take you there."

Health care delivery is at a crossroads, and the organizations' mission, vision and values can serve as a compass providing focus, direction and accountability. Mission and values hold tremendous potential to inspire and harness energies, navigate behaviors and guide decision-making through the complexities of evolving health care. They also play a vital role in creating identity, spirit, connection and in shaping a distinctive culture filled with hope.

In 1998, when the Catholic Health System of Buffalo, N.Y., was formed at the urging of Bishop Henry Mansell, it lacked a unified view and framework. The Cheshire Cat could not answer Alice's question because she wasn't sure what she was looking for. Catholic Health, fortunately, discovered its direction.

Joseph McDonald, president and chief executive officer of Catholic Health System, posed this question to its sponsors: "If we get it right, what would Catholic health care look like?" As a response, the system developed a new mission statement: "*We are called to reveal the healing love of Jesus to those in need.*" This simple statement not only helps engage all physicians and associates, but it highlights their very vocation — the call to Catholic health care. The call is like that of the founding religious who responded many decades ago. Catholic Health also developed a vision statement to direct our future growth: "*Inspired by faith and committed to excellence we will lead the transformation of health care in our communities.*" Together, the mission and vision statements provide focus and clarity to a patient/resident-centric culture.

Patient/resident-centered care meant

consolidating and integrating programs and services. The system had to put the communities it serves — their needs, hopes and resources — at the center of its business processes.

Decisions to invest in information systems and medical technology, not bricks and mortar, kept us moving forward. This also meant changing the organizational mindset from treating diseases to helping prevent them by promoting wellness and home-based medical care. The person-centered framework helped everyone — sponsors, board of directors, management, associates and physicians — to work together as one.

Catholic Health sees an increasing importance of a mission-centered, visionary approach to the challenges it faces. Catholic Health sponsors, mission leaders and system administrators developed the document "Sponsor Expectations & Mission Performance Standards," which honed focus on the mission and vision of the health system. This document holds religious sponsors, the system's governance and its leaders accountable for mission integration and provides standards for a 360-degree mission evaluation. Moreover, a shared accountability for mission ensures the effectiveness of mission at all levels.

This kind of accountability goes beyond the functional and symbolic role of mission integration to a lived daily reality. Processes like these take on even more importance as lay leaders assume roles previously held by religious. Utilizing and implementing these standards will help continue the legacy of the sponsors from generation to generation.

BART RODRIGUES is senior vice president, mission integration, Catholic Health System, Buffalo, N.Y.

To share your story of communicating mission, e-mail it to pschaeffer@chausa.org. Length: about 600 words, and please put "mission vignette" in the subject line.

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