

# Brooklyn Hospital Throws a Party For Its Community

BY RHODA WEISS

If you are looking for an example of mission in action, you can find it at St. Mary's Hospital of Brooklyn and its network of Family Care Centers, which offer a full range of services to poor and medically underserved working people in the Bedford-Stuyvesant, Crown Heights, Bushwick, East New York, and Ridgewood sections of New York City.

St. Mary's is part of Catholic Medical Center of Brooklyn and Queens (CMC), one of the state's largest nongovernmental providers of health services to the poor. This year, St. Mary's spent four straight days in May (during National Hospital Week) showing community members how they could improve their health status. On the first day, the public was invited to attend a health fair at the hospital. On the second day, hospital personnel—joined by area students and teachers and representatives of local organizations—held a parade that celebrated St. Mary's commitment to the community.

## WORLD'S LARGEST BABY SHOWER

On the third day of National Hospital Week, St. Mary's held what it calls the "World's Largest Baby Shower." The baby shower, an annual event, was created six years ago by Family Health Center outreach staff to help them locate local mothers-to-be who have no source of prenatal care or infant medical care.

On the day of the baby shower, the hospital collects gifts it will distribute to new mothers throughout the year. These gifts, ranging from disposable diapers to baby carriages, are donated by the hospital staff and other New Yorkers.

The 50 new mothers and mothers-to-be attending the baby shower this year represented the nearly 2,000 women who will have babies at St. Mary's in 1996. Also participating in the event were state and local government officials, including a representative of Brooklyn's borough president, who had proclaimed the day "St. Mary's World's Largest Baby Shower Day."



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## CHILDREN'S DAY

The fourth day of the week was "Children's Day," which St. Mary's held under a big tent pitched in its parking lot. More than 1,000 area children and their parents participated at no charge in the event, whose theme was drug-free living.

Inside the tent, the Federation of Black Cowboys put on a display of horsemanship. Music was provided by the Mongo Kenyatta Steel Band; clowns, dancers, and storytellers were among the other entertainers. Presentations were offered by the New York Museum of Natural History, the U.S. Marine Corps, St. Joseph's College, and the New York City Police Department. The Children's Day events were cosponsored by a number of local corporations, including CMC's Fidelis Care, one of the first Medicaid managed care programs to be licensed by the state.

## COMMUNICATING COST-EFFECTIVELY

St. Mary's publicizes these and other events primarily through news releases to New York City's daily newspapers and electronic media and to the more than 50 weekly papers (including the *Tablet*, the diocesan paper) in CMC's service area. Each media outlet is routinely sent two releases, the first well before the event and the second just a day or two before it. Then, after the event, each outlet is sent a photo (with suggested caption) of some activity. St. Mary's is able to do this on a shoestring public relations budget.

"New York is arguably the most difficult place in the country to achieve placements with such materials," said Stephen E. Phelps, Jr., CMC's director of public relations. "But we have been fortunate over the years to have some of the television news outlets do brief reports on the success of the World's Largest Baby Shower. And, for several years, one of the daily papers also ran feature stories on the baby shower program."

But St. Mary's cannot always count on getting such news coverage—especially the advance coverage that helps build community participation.

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## PATIENTS DEFINE "SERVICE"

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- Its flexibility in scheduling
- The simplicity of its billing system
- The accessibility of its parking
- The efficiency of its admission process
- The brevity of its waiting time for tests

Participants also said they preferred hospitals that contact the patient for follow-up after discharge.

### INFORMATION POINTS TOWARD EXCELLENCE

SJMMC's leaders made some procedural changes immediately after the focus group discussions. For example, staff members were given new scrub uniforms that are color-coded according to their departments, so that patients and family members can identify them easily. Staff members were also encouraged to:

- Attend in-service sessions
- Wear name tags bearing their photographs
- Clearly announce themselves to patients and family members when entering a room
- Strengthen their listening skills and treat patients and family members with respect

In addition, SJMMC has incorporated the focus group information into its Performance Excellence Process and also into the Patient Focused Care Program and the Performance Appraisal System, two methods used to fulfill the Performance Excellence Process.

The Performance Excellence Process, one of SJMMC's three key corporate strategies, was established to encourage employees to not only provide care that produces the best and most cost-effective clinical outcomes, but to provide it in such a courteous and professional manner that it exceeds the expectations of both patients and their families. The process's specific goals are quality, service, satisfaction, and cost containment—plus keeping all these in balance while maintaining the integrity of the mission and values of SJMMC's sponsor, the Religious Sisters of Mercy.

The Patient Focused Care Program, on the other hand, is a redesign of SJMMC's traditional processes. Emphasizing the needs of patients rather than the convenience of hospital

departments, the program works to eliminate the many delays, duplications, and obstacles that patients tend to experience during a hospital stay.

The Corporate Values/Service Excellence program is an integral part of the Performance Appraisal System, making up as much as 50 percent of an employee's overall job performance rating. This part of the appraisal system has three components:

- **Organizational.** This component encourages staff members to be familiar with SJMMC's mission, vision, and values, and to align their behavior with these values in service to others.

- **Individual.** This component urges staff to be true to the organization's values; adapt to, and work effectively with, change; take initiative; set challenging objectives; and seek opportunities to learn.

- **Team.** This component urges staff to build and maintain positive relationships with people and to appreciate differences in style, approach, and background.

Together these three components of the Performance Appraisal System encourage hospital employees to be of service to customers. Customer service is now expected of SJMMC employees because of its importance to the medical center's growth and success.

### LESSONS FOR LEADERS

The main lesson of the focus group research was that SJMMC's leaders must emphasize customer service in all their quality efforts. The focus group discussions reminded the leaders that a hospital's patients are its guests, and that the same is true of patients' friends and family members. Because customer service begins at the top, our leaders now emphasize it in their teaching, decision making, and behavior with others. In hiring new employees, for example, they seek persons who have not just the necessary technical skills but also those organizational, individual, and team skills emphasized in the three Performance Appraisal System components. □

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## BROOKLYN HOSPITAL

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Phelps and his St. Mary's colleagues have therefore developed a more grassroots approach to communications. This year, for example, they faxed news releases about the baby shower to each of the more than 200 parishes in the diocese, asking the parishes to mention the event in their weekly bulletins. They also distributed announcements of the event to employees of all CMC hospitals, nursing homes, and outpatient clinics.


But perhaps the most effective advance publicity was provided by St. Mary's employees themselves. By telling friends and relatives about hospital events, they have developed their own "marketing network," one that is supported by the hospital's administrators. "Many of the hospital's employees are local residents, and many of them serve as ambassadors to their neighborhoods or to the local organizations in which they are active," said Enid McCoy, St. Mary's executive director.

In addition, this year St. Mary's took the following measures:

- Local schools and other organizations were invited to participate in the health education program and the parade. Teachers gave their pupils announcements about Children's Day to take home.

- St. Mary's distributed fliers about Children's Day and the baby shower throughout its catchment area. Fliers were also posted in the hospital and each of its Family Care Centers.

- Trustees and administrators of St. Mary's and members of its community advisory board helped promote the events and participated in them. Since such persons are also often leaders or members of other local organizations—for example, businesses, social service agencies, other healthcare providers, planning boards, churches and synagogues, and PTA groups—they have the ability to draw much of the community into such an effort. □

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