A major goal of Catholic health care is to improve the community’s health through community relations, health education, and outreach. But efforts in health status improvement are also increasingly becoming part of business development and marketing.

A good example of this strategy change can be found at St. Joseph’s Mercy of Macomb, MI, a member of Trinity Health and Henry Ford Health System, where they are working to save lives, improve health, develop awareness, reduce costs, and generate funds. St. Joseph’s has developed initiatives that expand its influence in the community and support the organization’s core business and financial imperatives.

**GOING BEYOND HEALTH EDUCATION**

For the past 15 years, St. Joseph’s has been a community leader in health education through offerings—from complementary medicine to physician-led classes on joint replacement—that have had an impact on various clinical programs. But in the mid-1990s, St. Joseph’s began evolving its community-based programming beyond health education.

According to Scott Adler, St. Joseph’s vice president of community integration, the planning process began with a simple question: How can we facilitate the connections that allow neighbors to care for neighbors in a way that typical fee-for-service health care cannot?

“In his book *The Careless Society*, John McKnight argues that there has been a ‘professionalization’ of service to the point that neighbors feel inadequate in helping others through difficult times, such as the death of a loved one or dealing with heart disease or cancer,” explains Adler. “McKnight argues there is a fundamental difference between paying someone to provide a medically related service and caring support where no payment is necessary or expected.” Within this framework, St. Joseph’s developed two community-based nursing partnership programs.

**AN AFFORDABLE AND SUSTAINABLE PARISH NURSING NETWORK**

Parish nurse programs usually follow one of two models. The first involves hiring nurses and assigning churches to be their “territory.” However, “This model is self-limiting because health care organizations cannot always afford the numerous staff required, especially if the desire is to reach many different churches,” explains Amelia Brown, RN, BSN, who directs St. Joseph’s parish nursing network.

The second model—at the other end of the spectrum—is the all-volunteer parish nursing program. But, according to Brown, an ordained minister with a master’s degree in divinity, this model lacks quality controls necessary for an effective program and the structure to ensure ongoing commitment from volunteers.

Instead, St. Joseph’s developed a community-based, institutionally supported model that combines the deep caring of volunteers within a structure and quality framework to ensure the best care possible and maximum hours available from volunteers.

A core group of coordinators now manages relationships with the churches. They provide education required for network inclusion (30 contact hours) and continuing networking support. “The result is nothing short of remarkable,” says Brown.

Last year alone, 55 network churches had more than 30,000 parish nurse contacts. An online documentation system allows the nurses to list their contacts electronically, thus saving time and ensuring appropriate follow-up and quality monitoring. Additionally, the network received a $350,000 grant from the state of Michigan for a pilot study to demonstrate how increasing the independence of older adults translates into a decrease in Medicaid spending for nursing home care.

The network also developed an “at home and safe” program. The program’s home visits to hundreds of seniors help ensure a safe living envi...
care websites are available to consumers, hospitals have the distinct advantage of being seen as local sources of credible and trustworthy information. To profit from this advantage, a hospital must understand that online information seekers usually go through a two-step process.

Web users who have just been diagnosed as being ill will initially search the Web for the best available information about that illness. Once they have gathered specific information about the illness and its treatment options, they will begin exploring the treatments and services available in the region. It is at this crucial moment that a well-organized health care website can make a difference. By providing information about treatments offered and success rates, profiles of physician specialists, and descriptions of support services, a hospital site can help reduce consumers' anxiety and increase their loyalty to the hospital. Although a hospital website cannot take the place of face-to-face contact with a caregiver, it can be an alternative that provides consumers with easy access to information and services that they consider important. If done right, a site will provide a cost-effective means of extending the services beyond the walls of the organization.

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**NOTES**

3. Pew Internet & American Life Project.