

A Hospital That Is All Heart

BY RHODA WEISS

Although most hospitals diagnose and treat heart disease, one Catholic hospital in Roslyn, NY, does nothing else.

For more than 70 years, St. Francis Hospital, the Heart Center, has been synonymous with excellence in cardiac diagnostic, therapeutic, and rehabilitative services. New York's premier heart center, St. Francis has the highest cardiac case load in the state. Last year it logged almost 1,900 open heart surgeries, 4,884 cardiac catheterizations, 1,565 angioplasties, and 120 ablations (a permanent cure for life-threatening arrhythmias, or abnormal heartbeat). Its achievements are also evident in its occupancy rate, which reached 104 percent in 1992.

RESPONDING TO NEEDS

Part of the reason for its continuous success is its ability to respond to changing healthcare needs.

In addition to its extensive inpatient and outpatient services, St. Francis has been bringing hospital-based cardiac screening to medically indigent, underserved residents of low-income areas for more than four years through its Community Outreach Program. According to Lucille Paolillo Danaher, vice president for development, the hospital's outreach van transports medical supplies and cardiac monitoring equipment to various community sites. Walk-in patients receive blood tests, urinalysis, electrocardiograms, and physical examinations that can detect elevated cholesterol levels, high blood pressure, heart murmurs, valvular malfunction, and a host of congenital heart defects. Since 1989, more than 1,500 people from Nassau and Suffolk counties have been evaluated through the program.

Last year, St. Francis unveiled the DeMatteis Center for Cardiac Research and Education. Located off site at a 51-acre campus, DeMatteis is the new home to the hospital's Cardiac Fitness Center, featuring exercise programs for recovering heart patients and for those at high risk of



Ms. Weiss is a Santa Monica, CA-based marketing consultant.

developing heart disease. In addition, 35 community health programs, from heart-healthy nutrition and cooking classes to stress reduction and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) programs, are held in the center's lecture hall, various classrooms, and meeting rooms. The center also offers cholesterol and blood pressure screenings, computerized nutritional analysis, and individual and family counseling. These prevention programs, coupled with several ongoing community health programs, enable the hospital to reach a wider segment of the community in the fight against heart disease.

Another program St. Francis sponsors, Corporate Education and Screening, targets the region's corporations, primarily those with at least 100 employees. For a reasonable fee, corporations can arrange for on-site services to promote cardiovascular health. Blood pressure and cholesterol screenings are provided free of charge to its work force, thereby reducing days lost to sickness and disability and improving productivity. In addition, corporations may select from a variety of lecture topics focusing on the medical concerns of the group, ranging from safe exercise to healthy nutrition.

The center also offers a program for grade-school children from surrounding communities. "Get a Good Start on a Healthy Heart" teaches heart-healthy behaviors, such as establishing proper eating habits and exercise. More than 800 schoolchildren have participated in the program thus far.

During the DeMatteis Center's opening week, a series of medical seminars and health screenings were held to raise awareness about cardiac risk reduction. A prevention conference brought together some of the nation's most prominent physicians and researchers. Health screenings were offered for the public—and specifically for seniors—to detect elevated blood pressure and cholesterol, and St. Francis prevention experts advised participants about prevention programs and how to reduce heart disease risk.

RESEARCH AND EDUCATION

Augmenting the cardiac prevention program is the recent opening of the Research and Education Institute, which houses the Department of Preventive Cardiology and introduces a unique approach to cardiovascular health maintenance. The focal point of the institute at the DeMatteis Center is the ultrafast computed tomography scanner—the only noninvasive imaging device of its kind in the New York metropolitan area—which uses electron beam technology to detect calcium in clogged coronary arteries decades before the condition becomes symptomatic.

The institute will conduct investigations into the early diagnosis and prevention of cardiac disease. It will also support studies of new medicines, diets, and other therapies for the prevention and control of arteriosclerosis, symptomatic coronary artery disease, and congestive heart failure, plus trials of new devices and medications for control of disabling or life-threatening arrhythmias.

MARKETING CARDIAC PREVENTION

Although several area hospitals offer stop-smoking clinics, CPR training, and various screenings, an effective marketing plan has helped position St. Francis as the premier cardiac facility offering innovative cardiac screening programs and services. With the hospital always exceeding 100 percent capacity, the marketing department decided any strategy it devised should be geared to outpatient and educational services, according to Danaher. And since the DeMatteis Center is located four miles from the hospital, St. Francis marketing professionals realized that a highly visible strategy would have to strengthen the association between the two institutions.

To achieve these objectives, the marketing department launched an award-winning image campaign to reach a broad spectrum of patients. Full-page advertisements, news releases, and public service announcements appeared in both local and daily media. Press interviews appeared on radio and cable television.

“Using a variety of communications channels helped establish St. Francis Hospital in the public eye,” says Danaher. “One of the campaign effects was to influence consumers to associate St. Francis Hospital with the theme ‘Making Sure Your Heart Is in the Right Place.’ The slogan is now used universally in all forms of marketing and advertising for the hospital, including recruitment.”



A registered dietitian explains the principles of heart-healthy nutrition.

A direct mail campaign was initiated to raise community awareness of the cardiac screening and other programs. It consisted of personalized letters to referring and nonaffiliated physicians, allied health professionals, consumers who had and had not used the hospital, and the corporate sector. The campaign targeted a range of audiences from former heart patients to individuals residing in areas with selected ZIP codes.

Other tactics included special events in the form of open houses and seminars planned for physicians, members of civic organizations and local governments, area corporate personnel, and professional groups.

It also included events for allied health professionals linking St. Francis Hospital with the Long Island Heart Council and other not-for-profit groups that promote prevention, early detection, and treatment of cardiovascular disease. St. Francis and the council recently cosponsored a seminar on women and heart disease at the DeMatteis Center.

The plan also takes advantage of the “internal sales force” of the hospital’s 1,500 employees, various trustees, and a volunteer corps composed of nearly 1,000 men and women, all of whom act as “expert references” in the community by reinforcing the advertising and public relations messages. According to Danaher, the campaign effectively utilizes all the hospital’s resources to extend the awareness of the cardiac facility and programs while solidifying and expanding referral patterns among physicians in the region.

“Through this plan, we can cement St. Francis Hospital’s position as a leader and innovator in cardiovascular preventive services in the region and the nation,” she concludes. □