

Making a Difference In the Community

BY RHODA WEISS

Facing an uncertain economy, declining reimbursement, and rising costs, many hospitals are pulling back on their activities and services for the community.

Not so for Catholic hospitals. If anything, the community offerings seem to be expanding at Catholic facilities, which understand that the public's needs during these uncertain times are greater than ever.

This column focuses on two Catholic hospitals' community programs that are really making a difference to those they serve.

I'M IN CHARGE

At Holy Spirit Hospital in Camp Hill, PA, Holly, Polly, and Billy—three of the newest members of the hospital family—have assumed an important role: They are helping elementary schoolchildren learn more about their bodies and ways to stay healthy.

The stars of Holy Spirit's I'm in Charge program for children, which was designed by the hospital's volunteer department, Holly, Polly, and Billy are life-sized, soft-sculptured dolls that "teach" without saying a word. "All three dolls have Velcro openings that allow children to view the bone structures or organs," reports Director of Volunteers Mary Kelly. "Because the body parts are made of fabric and soft sculptured, they are less threatening to a child. They can easily be removed for children to see and touch."

Currently targeted to elementary school students, the program began seven years ago. This year it has already scheduled over 90 classrooms of about 30 students each. Volunteers explain body parts and remind children that they are in charge of keeping their own bodies in good working condition. I'm in Charge also includes discussions on healthy eating and exercise, as well as sing-alongs featuring songs composed by hospital volunteers. "The program is about total wellness, with an emphasis on personal responsibility," says Kelly, who designed I'm in Charge.



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"It reinforces what is already being taught in schools."

Holly Spirit, for example, opens to show her lungs, stomach, liver, and kidneys, while Polly Spirit shows the bone structure in her arms and legs. Billy Spirit is designed to expose a soft-sculptured brain, with tiny lights that flash on and off, simulating brain signals.

"The volunteers use Billy Spirit to show how the brain controls the body," Kelly explains. "We remind the children that we must take care of it by playing safe. We also demonstrate the harmful effects of drugs and alcohol on the brain by showing 'short circuits' with the lights. Once they see what a fascinating machine the human body is, they can fully comprehend the damage that drugs and alcohol can do to their body and mind."

At the conclusion of the program, volunteers give the children I'm in Charge buttons as a reminder that they are in charge of what goes into their bodies and how to take care of them.

HELPING HANDS

Taking care of others is the purpose of another Holy Spirit program called Helping Hands.

Last summer, a husband and wife from Ohio were traveling through the area when the wife suddenly required emergency hospitalization. During her stay at Holy Spirit, her husband probably would have been left to fend for himself had it not been for the aid of Helping Hands.

A cooperative outreach effort of Camp Hill Presbyterian Church and Holy Spirit Hospital, the program uses about 25 church member volunteers. They provide transportation, meals, lodging, shopping, companionship, and moral support to persons traveling through the area who become ill or have an accident requiring care at Holy Spirit. In addition to serving those far from home, the group provides transportation to local residents and elderly who need help getting to their physician or to the hospital for outpatient surgery, tests, or a visit with a family member.

The idea came from Betty Smith, former president of Camp Hill Presbyterian Church, who read about a similar effort in a magazine. "I saw the potential for our congregation and Holy Spirit Hospital to provide this kind of service," she said. Smith contacted former hospital president, Sr. Ursula Frei, SCC, who turned the program over to volunteer director Kelly. The program began four years ago.

The hospital's pastoral care, nursing, and social service staffs identify persons needing special assistance and then contact a volunteer from the church. "The Helping Hands members allow us to do more than we as a hospital could do ordinarily," says Kelly. "They extend hospitality beyond what we can provide."

CONCERN

Helping persons with special needs is also the goal of CONCERN, a program of the St. Vincent Infirmiry Medical Center Cancer Center, Little Rock, AR. Started nearly six years ago, CONCERN offers a level of support to cancer patients that was previously not available.

Take Valerie Kraft, for example. Her life-style was dramatically changed by a recurrence of cancer. She was an active church member, busy with social activities. Now she finds it hard to leave her home. And because her family lives out of town, she must rely on neighbors and friends for errands and other assistance. Most of the time, she feels so ill she has difficulty taking care of her personal business.

But Kraft has something most cancer patients do not: a social worker ready to assist her at any time with burdensome problems. Marita Pilcher of the St. Vincent Cancer Center visits Kraft at least once a week to discuss her problems and her feelings. Pilcher is familiar with the special needs of the cancer patient and can draw together the resources to meet those needs. For this service, Kraft and dozens of clients like her pay nothing.

CONCERN was created in response to requests from St. Vincent oncologists, who realized that their patients' emotional needs were not being met and that families needed help coordinating home care. "Once patients got home, they were cut off from their medical team," says Susan Henry, director of the cancer center. "It was possible for patients to get home nursing care, but there were no resources for other types of sup-



*With the help of
a soft-sculptured
doll, a volunteer
in the I'm in
Charge program
shows a group of
elementary
schoolchildren
where the lungs
are located.*

port and counseling." CONCERN was initially conceived as a hospice, but grew into a case management and counseling program because there was a greater need for those services.

Pilcher's work includes everything from assessing the home situation, to counseling bereaved families, to negotiating financial arrangements on behalf of patients. The only criteria for receiving services is that the person has cancer and has been or will be treated at St. Vincent Cancer Center. "We kept it free, realizing that most insurance policies would not cover the services and that if we did not charge there would be no restrictions or regulations. We could mold the program to fit the needs of our patients," Henry says.

Program costs are about \$42,000 a year. This covers salaries, mileage costs, supervisory costs, and clerical support.

Pilcher's work involves the family members as well. She helps them work through the emotional effects of the illness and, in terminal cases, through the bereavement process. When a client dies, Pilcher remains in touch with the family for at least a year.

Pilcher is available 24 hours a day to her clients. With the help of a \$3,500 Alcoa grant, she is developing a volunteer adjunct to the CONCERN program to provide such services as transportation and errand running. □