

Serving the Community: Beyond Medical Care

BY RHODA WEISS

Catholic hospitals have long realized that their obligations to the communities they serve go beyond offering healthcare services. Their ties to local schools, businesses, churches, and governments enable them to coordinate projects and to connect with persons other organizations have difficulty reaching.

In the three projects described in this column, Catholic healthcare organizations have turned their ties to various local populations into opportunities to inform and educate. For their efforts each has received a 1992 Catholic Health Association Spirit Award for excellence in communications.

HEAD INJURY PREVENTION

Every year 6,000 Iowans suffer head injuries, mostly as a result of cycling accidents. The majority of those injured were not wearing safety helmets. In the last decade, 83 percent of motorcycle riders killed in accidents in Iowa were not wearing helmets. Only 7 percent of Iowans wear helmets when bicycling, and only 5 percent of school-aged children wear bicycle helmets. Iowa's death rate associated with head injuries is the highest in the nation.

Last year Mercy Medical Center of Cedar Rapids, IA, teamed with the state Head Injury Prevention chapter, the local education association, the police department, the mayor, and a television station to do something about these grim statistics. They wanted to make more people aware that using bicycle helmets prevents injuries, to make helmets more affordable, to reduce peer pressure barriers to wearing helmets when cycling, and to educate the public on the importance of protecting the brain and spinal cord in all potentially dangerous situations.

"As a regional leader in neuroscience, orthopedics, and emergency medicine, we thought we should help spearhead these projects, says John Chehak, Mercy's director of public relations and marketing.



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The culmination of Mercy's Head Injury Prevention Campaign was Head Injury Prevention Week, kicked off in September 1991 by a widely covered news conference conducted by the local mayor. Featuring the slogan "GET H.I.P.: Get Head Injury Protection," the week's activities centered on promoting the use of approved helmets, general head injury prevention, and awareness of related and life-threatening injuries.

A local television station presented more than 60 public service announcements and news stories on the subject. Mercy supplied a neurosurgeon who presented case studies and a trauma center physician who rides a bike and wears a helmet. The hospital distributed an assortment of helmet stickers with slogans (including "Head Smart," "Leak Proof Protection," "I'm Under Cover," "Put a Lid on It," "I'm Head Strong," "Closely Guarded Secrets Enclosed," and "Don't Knock It") to more than 40,000 grade school students in eight Iowa counties and to the local police force.

In addition, the hospital designed book covers imprinted with head injury safety tips. Ten thousand were distributed to high school and middle school students in the local district.

A GET H.I.P. poster contest for all fourth- and fifth-grade students in Cedar Rapids was another part of Mercy's campaign. More than 1,000 students submitted posters illustrating the importance of wearing protective head gear. The posters were displayed in the hospital lobby and later in the local library. During Head Injury Prevention Week, Mercy held a press conference to announce the best posters from the two grades. All students participating received certificates, and the winners were awarded a bicycle, with a helmet. According to Chehak, the budget for the week-long project including printing costs, was less than \$5,000.

One of the major successes of the campaign was Mercy's ability to coordinate diverse local and state groups in this unified promotional and

small businesses, as well as to individuals and care givers who work with or treat persons who can benefit from the program.

THE HEALING CONNECTION

The relationship between Catholic hospitals and the parishes they serve is important to the future of the healing ministry. To strengthen this relationship, the Catholic Health Alliance for Metropolitan Chicago (CHAMC) created the Hospital-Parish Relations Committee consisting of representatives of the alliance and hospitals in the archdiocese. Although Catholic hospitals and their parishes were already collaborating in a number of ways, it was apparent that opportunities for further collaboration still existed.

CHAMC was formed in 1987 by the 15 congregations that sponsor Catholic hospitals in the Chicago archdiocese and the archdiocese itself. Its goal is to foster greater collaboration among archdiocesan hospitals. One result of the Hospital-Parish Relations Committee's efforts is *The Healing Connection*, a directory of services offered by Chicago hospitals.

The booklet distills what is known about the rich diversity of Catholic hospital-sponsored programs for parishes into a single volume. The alliance gathered information via questionnaires on the various programs offered by the hospitals. Once collected, programs were categorized in the booklet.

"The book was created for two reasons," explains Laura Nicholson, who was operations manager of the alliance when the directory was published. "First, the committee wanted to showcase the wide variety of services available from area Catholic hospitals. The second reason was to present a unified picture of Catholic healthcare. The directory shows Catholic hospitals not as stand-alone institutions, but as organizations willing to collaborate for the sake of the greater good—the Catholic healing ministry. The directory shows that Catholic hospitals are an integral part of the Church. This sense of shared Catholic identity further bonds the hospital and the rest of the parish community."

The Healing Connection is divided into three sections. The first part lists names and addresses of hospitals, with a map of the Chicago area indicating their location. In the second section, programs are listed by hospital. The final part of the directory lists available services in nine broad cat-

egories. These include programs for parish priests and religious, parishes and groups, children and schools, women, seniors, substance abusers, and the needy.

The booklet was written principally for individuals active in the healing ministry who could act as a resource for the parish community. These included hospital personnel, Catholic school administrators, pastors, parish secretaries, and pastoral care givers. There are approximately 400 parishes, 450 Catholic schools, and 20 Catholic hospitals in the Chicago archdiocese. About 1,900 individuals within these institutions belong to what the alliance defines as the primary market. These persons are committed to the healing ministry and realize that it involves the whole Church, not just the parish. In addition, they are in close contact with the parish community and are able to use the information in *The Healing Connection* in their daily activities.

The parish community, comprising about 2.3 million Catholics in the Chicago metropolitan area, is considered the directory's secondary market. "Many of these individuals seek advice from the primary market in times of troubles," Nicholson explains. "By targeting approximately 1,900 in the primary market, *The Healing Connection* is able to reach the larger secondary market as well."

In one case, however, CHAMC did attempt to reach end users of hospital services directly. The July 1991 issue of *Keen Ager News*, the archdiocese's monthly publication for seniors, carried a message from Card. Joseph Bernardin explaining CHAMC's work. A table accompanying the article listed all the services for seniors available from Catholic hospitals in the diocese and specified which hospitals offer them. The paper also contained coupons offering free copies of *The Healing Connection* to seniors.

According to CHAMC President James Lubawski, facilitating seniors' access to hospital services is an important part of the organization's mission. "Often, an older adult may know that a local hospital offers, say, insurance and billing counseling, but be unsure who to contact. The directory will give that person exactly the information needed to gain access to that service," Lubawski explains. So many seniors requested copies of *The Healing Connection* in response to the article in *Keen Ager* that the directory had to go into another printing. □

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