

# Forum

CATHERINE McAULEY HEALTH SYSTEM

## Respecting and Celebrating Cultural Diversity

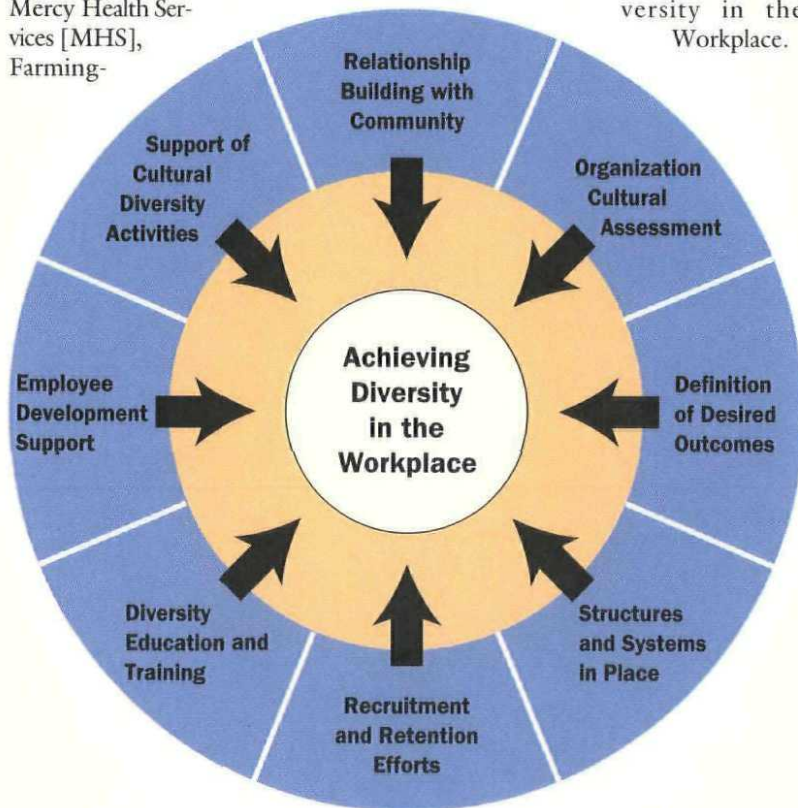
Cultural diversity is more than hiring women and black men, a fact attested to by organizations that have established cultural diversity programs. Our sex, skin color, religious beliefs, nation or region of birth, and a host of other characteristics affect how people perceive and treat us.

To ensure its employees respect and celebrate cultural diversity in the workplace, Catherine McAuley Health System, Ann Arbor, MI (which is part of Mercy Health Services [MHS], Farming-

ton Hills, MI), has implemented a work force diversity affirmative action plan.

The system began working on its cultural diversity plan in the mid-1980s, at a time when all MHS facilities were approaching the problem independently, Yolanda C. Vitale told participants at the Catholic Health Association's National Mission Conference in Chicago (see also "Chaos Offers Opportunity for Creativity," p. 20).

To avoid "reinventing the same wheel," MHS started bringing facility diversity committees together at least twice a year so they could exchange information and resources. As a result, MHS has developed a cultural diversity model (see Figure). "The model isn't linear—there isn't one place to start and one place to end up," said Vitale, who is Catherine McAuley's director of employee relations and a member of CHA's Task Force on Diversity in the Workplace.



### CULTURAL ASSESSMENT

There are many ways to do a cultural assessment, noted Vitale. When it first began its diversity program, Catherine McAuley conducted an employee opinion survey every six months. "It really gave us a read on the organization," said Vitale. Now that problem areas have been identified, the organization has cut down on the frequency of the surveys. In work groups having difficulties, however, surveys continue to be conducted every six months.

Another way to assess an organization's culture, suggested Vitale, is to analyze how the work force compares with the diversity found in the organization's geographic location.

### DESIRED OUTCOMES

Early in the establishment of a diversity program, an organization must define what it wants to accomplish. Vitale pointed out that these desired outcomes vary among MHS facilities, but they have common themes:

- Increase diversity among medical staff
- Increase the number of women and

people of color in management positions

- Troubleshoot and problem solve before issues get out of hand

• Ensure MHS institutions mirror the cultural diversity of the communities in which they are located



### STRUCTURES IN PLACE

Once an organization has established goals for its cultural diversity program, it must put in place structures and systems to get there. These include:

- Setting annual diversity goals
- Integrating diversity efforts with quality improvement initiatives and mission effectiveness
- Creating mechanisms for employees to voice discrimination concerns

• Establishing policies on discrimination, sexual harassment, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and work force diversity

- Providing benefits that support traditional and nontraditional families

### RECRUITMENT, RETENTION

Most MHS facilities began their cultural diversity programs in the area of recruitment

and retention, said Vitale. Recruitment firms must present a culturally balanced candidate pool to MHS facilities. If they do not, MHS facilities will not contract with them. Recruitment and retention activities in which Catherine McAuley has become involved include targeting its advertising of job fairs and opportunities to diverse populations and introducing minority children to healthcare professions.

#### EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The more traditional facet of a cultural diversity program is diversity education and training. Catherine McAuley board members and managers have received diversity awareness training.

Managers are given a packet of training material that includes the facility's philosophy and mission and how these relate to its cultural diversity program, information on affirmative action and protected classes, the program's goals, an action plan, a work force analysis, and a recruitment plan. Catherine McAuley's human resource development group presents diversity workshops to



Vitale

each department because each work group has a different composition and is at a different place in the diversity program.

#### EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT

Organizations can provide career development for all levels of employees. Catherine McAuley requires that a development plan become part of the annual performance review. As a result, the performance appraisal is less of a retrospective and more of a development plan for the coming year.

Other ways Catherine McAuley has worked employee development into its cultural diversity program include:

- Training managers to coach employees in career development
- Providing basic skills education
- Encouraging support groups for wom-

en and culturally diverse groups

- Sponsoring career fairs for employees

#### SUPPORT OF ACTIVITIES

Catherine McAuley also supports ongoing cultural diversity activities such as celebrating Martin Luther King Day. In addition, the facility sponsors brown bag lunches that provide cultural information, uses language that values diversity, and focuses all program reflections on cultural diversity to ensure the topic permeates the environment.

#### RELATIONSHIP BUILDING WITH THE COMMUNITY

An organization must form a relationship with its community. "We have to be part of the community, not outside the community," asserted Vitale.

Catherine McAuley executives are involved with community, regional, and national diversity committees and task forces. The organization has joined groups and associations committed to achieving diversity such as the National Center for the Advancement of Blacks in the Health Professions.

—Michelle Hey

For more information, call Yolanda Vitale at 313-712-3577.

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