

“ WE FIRMLY BELIEVE THAT CULTURE IS INEXTRICABLY LINKED WITH OUR VALUES. IT REPRESENTS THE CRITICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF A HEALTHY ORGANIZATION. EXCELLENCE IN INTEGRATED PATIENT CARE CAN ONLY OCCUR IN A CULTURE THAT IS NURTURED TO BRING OUT THE VERY BEST IN EVERYONE INVOLVED — TIM RUTLEDGE, NORTH YORK GENERAL HOSPITAL PRESIDENT/CEO

# A healthful approach to care and culture

NORTH YORK GENERAL HOSPITAL

KATHRYN BOOTHBY

Excellence, respect, integrity, compassion. These are the watchwords to put patients first at North York General Hospital (NYGH). Translating those words into action begins with a winning culture that engages and promotes the well-being of the hospital's staff, physicians and volunteers.

The culture at NYGH inspires curiosity, inclusion and service excellence that motivate employees to learn and thereby advance their commitment to patients and their families.

“We firmly believe that culture is inextricably linked with our values. It represents the critical underpinning of a healthy organization,” says Tim Rutledge, president and CEO. “Excellence in integrated patient care can only occur in a culture that is nurtured to bring out the very best in everyone involved.”

The dedication to culture has earned NYGH the designation of one of Canada's 10 Most Admired Corporate Cultures (Broader Public Sector category) for 2015 in the annual recognition program operated by Waterstone Human Capital.

A community teaching hospital, NYGH combines clinical strengths, academic reputation, patient volumes and diversity to foster and support research and innovation. Collaboration with system partners, including other hospitals and primary, home and community care providers, is key. Staff, physicians, volunteers, patients and their families are equally important as they collaborate on the front lines to deliver optimum health solutions.

These partnerships have helped redefine relationships at the hospital.

“There is a transformational shift in play that is moving us away from a system of care that is delivered to and for patients to one where patients are co-contributors to their own care and where families are part of that experience,” says Gabrielle Bochynek, vice-president of people services and organizational development. “Putting patients first in everything we do means engaging patients and families. We wish to understand what will make their stay less stressful and provide a more positive experience overall. We are continually challenged to reinforce the ‘patient first’ mantra to be all that we, and they, want us to be.”

Toward that goal, the hospital has embraced a philosophy of patient- and family-centred care (PFCC). The philosophy is guided by an advisory committee, formed in late 2012, which is made up of a dozen former NYGH patients or family members who had expressed interest in working with the hospital as patient advisers.

Margo Twohig underwent cancer treatment at the hospital. She was invited to join the advisory committee by her oncologist and is now its co-chair. The committee actively participates in decision-making to enhance the experience and quality of care provided to those who walk through the doors at NYGH.

“It's not about wagging fingers at clinicians and staff, or telling surgeons how do their job. It's about approaching everything from the perspective of the patient or family member. That means acknowledging that hospital visits can increase anxiety. Offering an inviting atmosphere that is combined with compassion and communication can help reduce that anxiety,” she says. “Ultimately, care and procedures may



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The employee community at North York General Hospital, such as the Centre for Education staff (above), support a corporate culture with a special focus on excellence, respect, integrity and compassion for patients and their families.

remain the same. However, this approach gives people the opportunity to understand what they will be undergoing and helps allay their fears in a comforting environment.”

While it's easy to talk about PFCC, there must be buy-in at the senior level and visible responses in the drive toward change, adds Twohig. “Eliminating fixed visit-

is to bring advisers into all other areas to further improve health-care delivery and the patient experience.”

The commitment to collaboration and innovation stretches far beyond the doors of NYGH, however. The hospital helped found two separate but equally important health-care consortia to hasten health-care system transformation.

PUTTING PATIENTS FIRST IN EVERYTHING WE DO MEANS ENGAGING PATIENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES SO WE UNDERSTAND WHAT THAT MEANS TO THEM

ing hours and providing greater family access is a massive undertaking that won't happen overnight, but the commitment has been made and it will happen,” she says. “For individual units at the hospital, integrating patient advisers has already proven beneficial for intensive care and neonatal units. The goal now

The six-hospital Joint Centres for Transformative Healthcare Innovation focuses on best practices and how to implement them across all partners. Groundbreaking innovations have resulted from the partnership over three years since inception and are currently being scaled up and implemented to help further heighten and

strengthen the standard of care and operations across its members.

One important initiative to come out of these collaborative efforts is an approach to reduce incidences of aggressive behaviour often experienced by health-care providers across the sector. Incidences of workplace violence toward staff is an increasing concern. Applying an effective strategy in this area will have a positive impact on patient- and family-centred care, on staff, physicians and volunteers, and on the overall culture at all of the hospitals involved, notes Rutledge.

The six-hospital Leadership & Organizational Development Consortium was established to address a system-wide priority — the development of current and new leaders. The consortium shares its resources across hospital settings to provide mentorship opportunities and shared educational courses. This method ensures the best and most ef-

ficient use of limited resources for what is an important priority for all hospitals involved.

When asked to imagine how the NYGH culture will develop over the next five years, Bochynek says it's about creativity and innovation, continued learning, diversity and inclusion, and generational change.

“Constantly questioning the status quo to drive improvement; capacity building for leaders and staff; inspiring and welcoming diversity of thought and ensuring every staff member, volunteer and physician is confident in bringing ideas to the table. These are the things that will challenge us,” she says.

It takes excellence to reach the next level, adds Rutledge. “We have to be mindful across the continuum and seek to learn in every way. Collaboration, innovation and collegiality are all parts of the culture that must continue to evolve at NYGH to ensure that the patient always comes first.”

## Training the health professionals of tomorrow

For more than four decades, North York General Hospital (NYGH) and its staff have played an active role in teaching future professionals across the health-care spectrum.

In 2014 the hospital centralized its approach, forming the Centre for Education to better integrate training with a philosophy of patient- and family-centred care.

Displaying yet another example of collaboration beyond its own walls, NY-

GH's Centre for Education partners with 36 academic institutions, including the University of Toronto, which sends students to train at the facility. Last year alone it welcomed almost 700 medical students and residents in training and 1,000 nursing students, as well participants spanning 34 other professions.

“The Centre for Education helped us to rethink and reimagine what inter-professional care looks like,” says Rick

Penciner, emergency physician and director of medical education. “We have eliminated the medical and nursing school silos. Today it's about learning in real terms on the front line and bringing students from different professions together to learn from one another.”

Research shows that those who are teachers in the health-care system deliver the best in patient care, adds Dawne Barbieri, director of inter-professional practice,

research and education at NYGH, and co-director of the Centre for Education. “As physicians and nurses teach and interact with learners in real-life situations, patient care is delivered to the highest quality using the best evidence available.”

This new approach to learning is not only helping to build capacity, it's breaking down barriers at the bedside, she says. “Nurses, doctors and psychologists are interacting and building

strong relationships. When they return to a clinical setting, they are able to collaborate more effectively on patient issues.”

On the other side of the table, one of the biggest roles the centre plays is in supporting teacher and faculty development. Programs for staff and physicians range from Teaching 101 to more advanced development for those looking to earn related accreditation such as a masters of education.

Adding to the bank of knowledge is also important. “We constantly review the curriculum, evaluate and approach education in a sys-

tematic way, and determine what needs to be done differently,” notes Penciner. “We then disseminate the information through journals and conferences to add to the body of knowledge for training the health professionals of tomorrow.”

Supporting existing partnerships and fostering new relationships outside the hospital is extremely important to the future of the Centre for Education, he adds. “To be successful in an organization you must continuously look outward to trends and opportunities from which new programs and ideas can be generated.”



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