

## Physicians and Employees: Cayuga's Highway to Excellence

*Cayuga Medical Center, Ithaca, New York*

Some would interpret Andrew Carnegie's quote as proving the connection between people and the businesses they work for—which is certainly true, but that's not quite the full picture. You need the context; Andrew Carnegie was fanatical about employee recognition *and* involvement.

**"Take away my people, but leave my factories, and soon grass will grow on the factory floors. Take away my factories, but leave my people, and soon we will have a new and better factory."**

Andrew Carnegie

### HealthStream Research

HealthStream Research is a national leader in the measurement of physician, employee, patient, and community satisfaction for healthcare organizations. We currently work with more than 1,100 facilities nationwide, including many of the nation's largest for-profit and not-for-profit health systems and specialty healthcare companies.

He didn't say "*I* will have a new and better factory"—he said *we*.

It's not enough to connect to your physicians—you need to create an environment where they connect right back, through your employees. Cayuga Medical Center didn't just talk to their physicians—they listened. The physicians didn't just sit back and soak up the ideas of administration—they brought their own fresh ideas to the table. The results, goals, strengths, weakness—everything was transparent throughout the entire organization. Once you open up a highway for dialogue, don't be surprised if everybody wants to make the trip.

"In fact, the success we've enjoyed with our physicians didn't even start with the physicians. We have found that it's important to start addressing the 'people' challenges first. If our employees feel rewarded, supported, and positively challenged, then they are inspired to meet our customers' needs and exceed their expectations. When that happens with patients, physicians take notice. Then when we exceed the physicians' expectations—on lab turnaround time, or imaging reports, for example—their satisfaction with us helps drive our bottom line," said Dr. Mackenzie.

## Success Story: Cayuga Medical Center

As a result of input from board members, leaders, Cayuga Medical Center’s employee surveys in late 2002 and HealthStream Research’s recommendations, the medical center identified five values which drive their organization:

- Our People
- Clinical Excellence
- Customer Service
- Fiscal Integrity
- Community Partnership

Their organizational balanced scorecard tracks metrics aligned with their values—such as employee satisfaction and turnover, customer satisfaction and physician satisfaction for customer service. Their balanced scorecard goals and metrics then cascade down through the organization, so that each manager's goals are expected to be aligned with the overall goals. “Scores are transparent to everybody. This ensures accountability and provides the means to gain buy-in on operational goals,” said Dr. Mackenzie.

The research performed by HealthStream Research illuminated the detailed suggestions and concerns of the medical staff, which led to a wide range of initiatives and improvements. Below is an assortment of the tactics and philosophies that have been very beneficial to Cayuga Medical Center’s relationship with their independent physicians:

- They have a strong physician-hospital business organization (PHO) which helps facilitate physician-hospital ventures, initiatives and strategies, and provider-payer issues. “We began with a team of 10 physicians and managers—now, more than 200 are on the team,” said Dr. Mackenzie.
- The PHO has an office-managers' group that plays a key communication role by acting as a buffer for business issues. This group meets regularly, handles the day-to-day business tasks, and shares best practices aimed at streamlining the business process. Physicians prefer to practice medicine, not work on business issues.
- They divide capital requests into Medical and Administrative—everything related to Medical is reviewed and prioritized by the physicians.
- They carefully track (and meet regularly to address) waiting times for all ancillary services, so that they can out-compete commercial lab and imaging vendors. The excellent results for these ancillary services speak for themselves:

Factor/Service	Cayuga Medical Center Mean	HealthStream Client Database Mean	Cayuga Medical Center Percentile Ranking
Laboratory services	4.10*	3.62	99 <sup>th</sup>
Pathology services	4.09*	3.86	92 <sup>nd</sup>
Pharmacy services	4.04*	3.74	90 <sup>th</sup>
Imaging services	4.09*	3.64	95 <sup>th</sup>
Outpatient rehabilitation & physical therapy services	3.94*	3.65	96 <sup>th</sup>

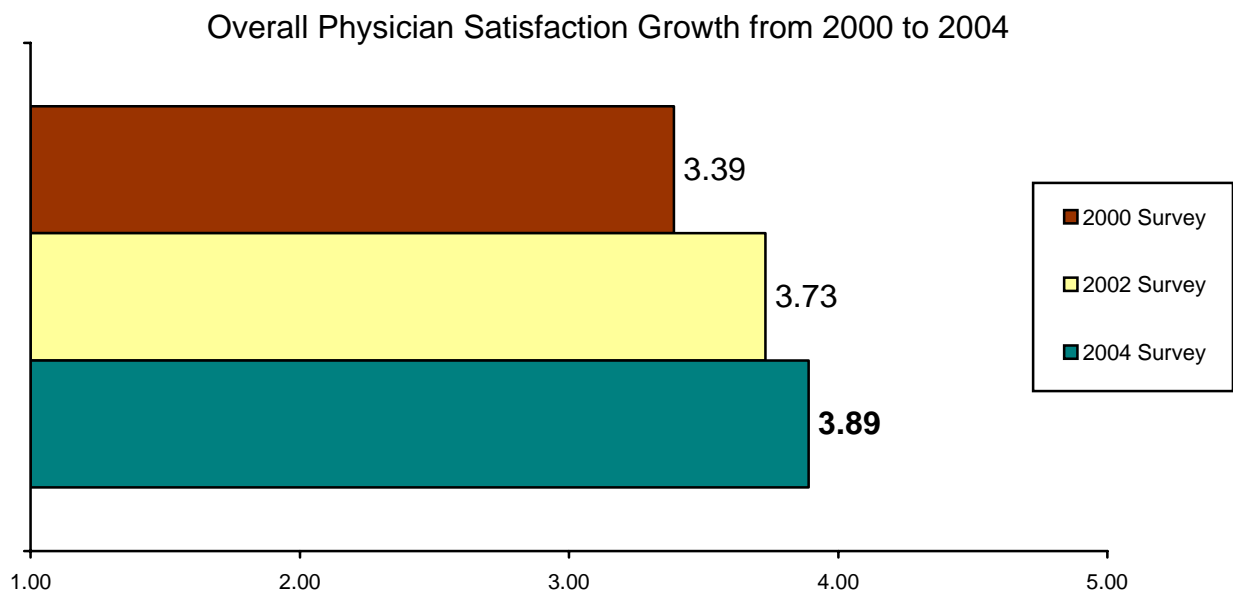
- They hold "kitchen cabinet" breakfast meetings with physician opinion leaders and with randomly selected docs, in addition to the usual medical staff and Board functions.
- They support their physicians in every way they can, including a **hospitalist** and **intensivist** program.

**Hospitalist Program:** “Primary care physicians want to spend time providing care—not driving back and forth between the hospital and office. We started a voluntary hospitalist program and carefully measured the impact of the program. The physicians loved it. Not only does this program free them up to focus on their office practice, but the hospitalist also gives the physicians highly detailed clinical reports. This all adds up to better care for the patients,” said Dr. Mackenzie. The program began as a part-time venture on certain days, but it has incrementally grown to a 24/7 program with six hospitalists.

**Intensivist Program:** “This was a natural offshoot from the hospitalist program. Our intensivists have been key leaders for our Intensive Care quality improvement initiatives. As a result we’ve been able to reduce ventilator-associated pneumonia cases from one every month or two down to **one in 18 months.**” said Dr. Mackenzie. The intensivist program utilizes 1.5 FTEs for their 8-bed ICU and 8 sub-acute beds. The intensivists also help to cover other departments when possible and as needed.

“We try to coordinate with the physicians on anything that can impact their practices—but just as often, this high level of communication works in the other direction,” said Dr. Mackenzie. “For example, the physicians brought to our attention that local radiation service needs were not being met. In putting together a plan to fill this unmet community healthcare need, we first went to the physicians and asked them how *they* would define a successful radiation service program. Their coaching led us to file a successful Certificate of Need application with the state of New York. This support and participation brought the program from idea to implementation in 18 months.”

Cayuga Medical Center whole-heartedly believes that there is no such thing as a *non*-customer group. “We certainly treat our physicians as a key customer group. All the well-known precepts of customer service apply to physicians—find out what their expectations are, and then exceed them,” said Dr. Mackenzie. So, what effect has this approach had on the physicians?



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Like many other clients of HealthStream Research, Cayuga Medical Center has seen the following cyclical trend of success: First, leaders meet employees' needs, which leads to employees exceeding patients' expectations. Then, the increased patient satisfaction drives physician engagement and loyalty. This drives increased physician referrals, which in turn drives the organizational bottom line.

And how do the employees feel about all of this? Like tossing a stone in a pond, the ripples don't stop with the physicians. Marking major improvements since their initial survey research with HealthStream Research, the items listed below gained "honor roll" status as they are ranked at or above the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile of the HealthStream Client Database—an outstanding achievement!

- My immediate supervisor is proud to work for the medical center (99<sup>th</sup> percentile)
- Administration listens to my immediate supervisor and acts on his or her suggestions (99<sup>th</sup> percentile)
- My pay is fair (96<sup>th</sup> percentile)
- The medical center's benefits package meets my needs (95<sup>th</sup> percentile)
- I trust the medical center's management and leadership (91<sup>st</sup> percentile)
- My immediate supervisor consistently stresses the importance of customer satisfaction (98<sup>th</sup> percentile)
- I would want to be a patient at this medical center if I needed medical care (95<sup>th</sup> percentile)

"We couldn't be more pleased with HealthStream Research and how they have helped us make positive organization-wide changes," said Dr. Mackenzie. "*That* is success."