

How One CEO Helped Bring a Hospital Back to Life

Saint Mary's Standish Community Hospital, Standish, Michigan

Regardless of their size or location, hospitals across the nation face the challenge of recruiting and retaining loyal, motivated, caring employees. Their satisfaction helps ensure patient and physician satisfaction and their commitment to quality is essential to the success of the hospital. After interviewing Saint Mary's Standish Community Hospital's (SMSCH) CEO, Jeff Probus, we learned why this small hospital in one of the poorest counties in Michigan has made great strides in employee satisfaction and loyalty.

Previously a community hospital, things began to change dramatically for SMSCH when purchased by Ascension Health. When Jeff arrived at SMSCH nearly three years ago, he found a hospital that was in very poor shape, with almost no cash flow and very low employee morale. "The first two years of my tenure here have been focused on bringing this hospital back to life," notes Jeff. Along with Jeff, the management team at SMSCH began to make much needed changes to the facility that resulted in enormous response from the employees. "We immediately replaced everyday items like lights, wallpaper, art work, and equipment. We then implemented a 'Socially Just Wage' for all employees...meaning that no associate with SMSCH receives a wage that is less than the poverty line," recounts Jeff.

These first major initiatives triggered the upward climb of employee morale and the turnaround of a once failing hospital to a hospital, in Jeff's words, "that maintains an 8% patient margin while recent reporting shows the average patient margin in Michigan for all hospitals was -3.2%." Following the initial, dramatic changes introduced by Jeff and the management team, SMSCH has added a dining area with beautiful skylights and a non-denominational chapel. These renovations have SMSCH in the running for the 2005 Modern Healthcare Design Awards.

To maintain employee loyalty and morale, the management team at SMSCH implemented several ongoing activities and/or programs, including...

- Quarterly BBQs open to the community where Jeff does the grilling
- CEO website that allows employees to direct confidential concerns to Jeff
- Reward program for ideas that help save the hospital money (up to \$250 reward for employees)
- Ice cream social during National Hospital Week

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Success Story: St. Mary's Standish Community Hospital

Aside from programs or activities, Jeff notes that one key to SMSCH's success is, "openness by management at all levels to communicate...we don't just hear our employees, we *listen* to them." It is also important to talk to everyone. "We talk to the rank and file. They really know what's going on." A second key to success is the relationship between administration and the medical staff, which is highly dependent upon active listening and healthy communication.

The successes at SMSCH do not end with high levels of employee satisfaction. Although located in one of the poorest counties in Michigan, SMSCH has become one of the most technologically advanced hospitals in the country. In fact, SMSCH won national awards such as the "Most Wired Hospital" in the "Small and Rural" category and "Most Improved" - "Small and Rural" category. SMSCH boasts of private, "pull-up" televisions at each patient bed and Internet access in each patient room. Physicians also benefit from the technology at SMSCH with the ability to access patient information via the Internet from any location.

SMSCH has made huge strides in the area of employee satisfaction along with several areas of patient care and comfort. These changes have certainly not gone unseen. For example, SMSCH is also the proud recipient of the Governor's Award for Excellence two years in a row and is gearing up for their third receipt of this prestigious award. One theme seems to stand out regarding this particular hospital; in the words of Jeff Probus, "Whatever you do — do it really well."