

## **Case Study: Putting a Leadership Strategy into Action**

This article appeared in Corporate Health Group's Winter 2002 Newsletter.

The Valley Health System, based in Ridgewood, New Jersey, is reaping the benefits of creating leadership opportunities in its organization.

In 2001, the 427-bed community hospital and tertiary care system worked in earnest to implement a revamped customer service approach – called the Service Excellence Strategy. The plan reaches out to all constituents of the health system, including patients, employees and physicians.

To move its plan forward, the system is emphasizing the importance of leadership in several ways. The Valley Health System already had a set of leadership standards in place. All managers, directors and vice presidents actually sign off on these and agree to make them part of their on-the-job actions. The fundamental premise: that each person is there to serve the organization's employees, patients and physicians.

Next, the organization relies on the guidance of its top leaders. "The support of our system and hospital CEOs is absolutely key to this effort," says Gail Callandrillo, vice president of planning and market research for the health system. "We've been fortunate to have a very good relationship with them over the years, where there's a lot of consensus building."

Hospital CEO Audrey Meyers, for example, leads "take-a-break" sessions where employees are encouraged to discuss issues, corporate philosophy and the customer service initiative. Meyers has attended sessions "around the clock" in order to meet with staffers from various shifts. The sessions give her an opportunity to articulate the vision of the organization and get valuable feedback.

The system also has established "fire-starter" teams to help promote a customer focus as well as leadership among all levels of employees. People from throughout the organization have participated in groups including reward and recognition, communication, patient satisfaction and a "bright ideas" team.

One tangible result of this leadership-on-many-levels effort is that patient satisfaction scores are on the way up – with a goal of achieving a 99 percent satisfaction rate.

In 2002, the system is continuing to focus on employee and patient satisfaction, with a special emphasis on its physicians. January marks the grand opening of a newly remodeled and expanded ambulatory center, providing physicians with expanded access for their patients.

To help reach out to staff physicians and encourage them to bring their patients to the new center, Valley hired Corporate Health Group to evaluate the best approach for enhancing referral relationships. Working with CHG, the organization has hired a physician relations director. This front-line team leader serves as an important liaison to discuss issues important to physicians and help keep the organization accountable and provide solutions.

Corporate Health Group, says Callandrillo, has played an important role in identifying new ways to bring the organization together and promote leadership among all employees. "They kept us focused on what we really wanted to do, and the best way to get there."

