

How hospitals become great places to

Work

BY GRAHAM S. LOWE

There is broad consensus that Canada's healthcare employers must do more to support and develop their staff within healthy and positive environments. Turning the corner on healthcare human resource challenges requires nothing short of cultural transformation.

Just as in other industries, the transformational journey is step-by-step. The goal: building a high-trust culture that encourages innovation and supports employees to deliver the highest-quality patient care and community services. Research by the Great Place to Work Institute shows that hospitals can achieve the high-trust cultures that define great workplaces. The Institute's 2005 100 Best Companies to Work For in America, published in *Fortune* magazine, identifies seven hospitals that have exceptional cultures and people practices. The *Fortune* list—like similar best-practices lists the Institute does in 20 other countries, including Canada in 2006—is based on employee survey results and an audit of the company's human resource policies and procedures, which assesses cultural practices.

Strong patient *and* employee-centred cultures make these hospitals unique—and remarkably successful. Employees and managers trust each other, employees have lots of pride in their jobs and feel recognized and rewarded for their contributions. Teamwork and camaraderie is deeply valued.

Bronson Healthcare Group in Kalamazoo, Mich., is a community-owned organization with 3,800 employ-

ees. Bronson's CEO equates the people practices that create high trust and provide work-life balance with employee retention: "Because we listen to our employees and what they're telling us, we've been able to keep them here." Bronson has an annual registered nurse turnover rate of about half the U.S. average, and has won many awards for its human resource practices and overall performance, including for patient satisfaction.

Baptist Health Care in Pensacola, Fla., operates five acute-care hospitals, nursing homes, and mental

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health and outpatient facilities. Baptist Health Care attributes its service excellence to the transformation of its culture and work environment since 1995, guided by three principles: employee satisfaction, patient satisfaction and leadership development. Driving the changes are employee teams on culture, communication, customer loyalty, employee loyalty, and physician loyalty. Teams use a variety of measures to create transparency and accountability. Regular surveys of employees, physicians and patients inform continuous communication and action planning.

Another turnaround story is Memorial Health, in Savannah, Ga. A recent recipient of a JD Powers award for patient experience and deemed by *Consumers'r Digest* as one of the safest hospitals in the U.S., in the mid-90s Memorial was the last choice of healthcare consumers in its community. A new

CEO helped to change the culture, starting with a clear message and a new mission: making people feel better. The culture was built on values of respect, trust, world-class healthcare, enjoyment and the team members' accountability to themselves and their organization. Open communication from the CEO right down to the front lines of patient care ensures that everyone in the organization knows, and lives by, these values.

At the Mayo Clinic, the needs of patients are paramount. So is teamwork. The Mayo philosophy is that

it takes a team to care for a patient and that every job counts. Mayo Clinic's legendary emphasis on learning, innovation and cooperative medicine has brought numerous awards, including the Magnet Hospital designation. The key to engaging the hearts and minds of employees is the Mayo's culture. Focus groups with patients and staff find a shared image of the organization: people holding hands.

We can't assume from these examples that U.S. healthcare organizations are ahead of their Canadian counterparts. In Canada, we need better ways of recognizing and sharing successful workplace cultures. The sustainability of the healthcare system depends on it. **CHM**

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