

Hospital as *Healing Community* by Harvey Zarren, MD, FACC

Hospitals in the United States and in other western countries currently operate under serious financial limitations and the attitudinal limits imposed by bottom-line oriented health care. The morale issues and working conditions under current health care have rapidly led to limitations imposed by decreased staff availability, particularly reflected in current shortages of trained nurses.

Financial changes will need to come from altered societal views about health care and from a shift from expensive intervention-focused health care to less expensive prevention-oriented health care that is clearly feasible with current knowledge.

The morale issues and working conditions can be altered by looking at hospitals as *Healing Communities*.

Healing is a journey toward wholeness or wellness. *Community* is a body of people living in the same place under the same laws and can also be defined as joint ownership. If a hospital exists as *Healing Community*, then all members of the community have the opportunity to heal.

Thus, a hospital as a *Healing Community* can be seen as a place in which patients, their families and friends, caregivers (including managers and the board), and the community can all journey toward wellness, with all parties having joint ownership in the process and the experience.

Common ownership of the process and experience of healing in community means that the energy encompassing the community and connecting all its members, including patients and caregivers, can be fostered and enhanced or eroded by each member of the community. That energy responsibility includes the energy of non-direct caregiving members of the hospital such as the board of trustees and departments such as maintenance, marketing, and accounting. Each person carries the community intention to healing for all members of the community.

Intention is the determination to behave in a certain way with certain goals in mind—in this case, that all have the opportunity to move along a journey toward wellness. In a *Healing Community*, the intention to provide a healing environment and experience is in each individual and is overtly and constantly remembered and enhanced.

Hospital as *Healing Community*: Characteristics

A hospital as a *Healing Community* provides:

- ◆ A safe environment with respect for the healing qualities connected with interpersonal caring and human interaction.
- ◆ A safe environment providing healing, educational, and supportive human experiences.
- ◆ A safe environment that recognizes and promotes the self-healing abilities of each individual.
- ◆ A safe environment that places people and the value of human interaction in the center of the healing journey for the benefit of both patients and caregivers.

- ◆ A safe environment in which people can journey toward physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and tribal wellness.
- ◆ A safe environment that offers the highest quality technical tools for healing.
- ◆ A safe environment offering not only technical competency but competency in kindness, compassion, acceptance, spirituality, and relationship.

Individuality and Diversity Valued

A hospital as a *Healing Community*:

- ◆ Respects the dignity and uniqueness of each human being and of all human experience—that of those who come for healing and of those who choose to serve.
- ◆ Values diversity as a source of human experiential richness and does not see diversity as a reason for isolation or loneliness.
- ◆ Values diversity in caregivers as creating strength from a rich fabric of individuals working to serve the common goal of relieving suffering.
- ◆ Holds to the ideal and the intention that language and culture need not be barriers to optimal healing experience.
- ◆ Holds to the ideal that physical or other disabilities are not a reason for isolation or loneliness.
- ◆ Holds to the premise that aging is a potential for wisdom to be respected and is not a reason for isolation or loneliness.

Implications of Hospital As *Healing Community*

A hospital that is a *Healing Community* is a place where the following are evident:

- ◆ Wellness (physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and tribal) is addressed, encouraged, and supported.
- ◆ All find and take the opportunities, support, and encouragement for healing—the journey toward wholeness or wellness.
- ◆ All people are committed to each other's wellness, dignity, and dreams.
- ◆ Needs of both patients and caregivers are met.
- ◆ Each person's needs are met by the community as a whole; the needs do not need to be met by just one person.
- ◆ Each person can function in an environment that allows and fosters meaning in his or her work.
- ◆ Each person can remember the joy and the privilege of helping to relieve the suffering of others, even if the others are not always joyful or privileged.
- ◆ Each person can treat all those coming for care with sensitivity and dignity, even if the condition or behavior of those people is less than optimal.
- ◆ When an individual cannot adequately serve someone whose behavior or condition is less than optimal, then another caregiver in the community will step in to provide that service; and the individual who could not serve will get the necessary support for personal healing.
- ◆ Mistakes and errors are seen as opportunities for growth and learning rather than as opportunities for finger pointing and blame.
- ◆ All feelings are tolerated; some behaviors call for guidance.
- ◆ All appropriate tools for wellness are employed as appropriate.

- ◆ Proper nourishment is provided for each aspect of wellness.
- ◆ Healthy food is available.
- ◆ People are heard, loved, and touched, and feel safe.
- ◆ The inner strength, wisdom, and common sense of patients are heard and respected.
- ◆ People get to share their stories.
- ◆ Listening skills are universally present and are applied.
- ◆ Humor is prevalent.
- ◆ Attention is paid to meaningful relationships, and relationship skills are taught and fostered.
- ◆ Coping skills are taught and shared.
- ◆ Attention is paid to the environment as to its potential for enhancing or eroding healing.
- ◆ Each person's strengths are fostered.
- ◆ Spiritual strengths are fostered, and spiritual needs are met.
- ◆ End of life is served with dignity, respect, and love.
- ◆ Those serving suffering people in pain or at the end of life get what they need to nourish themselves for life and work.
- ◆ The value of quiet time is acknowledged.
- ◆ All education is invitational.
- ◆ Each person can feel that his or her efforts matter, are important, and can help to create change.

Hospital Neighborhoods

A hospital is not a homogeneous institution. It is composed of many individual neighborhoods—some defined by location (such as the emergency room) and some defined by job description (such as ECG and IV therapy).

- ◆ Each neighborhood has its own history, its own culture, and its own way of doing things.
- ◆ All neighborhoods have value, and their diversity adds to the richness of hospital as a *Healing Community*.
- ◆ Each neighborhood uses its own approaches and its own personality in its work.
- ◆ Each neighborhood has strengths and vulnerabilities; they will differ.
- ◆ Each neighborhood can learn and gain strength from its neighbors and can share its strengths and assets with its neighbors, thus enhancing *Healing Community*.
- ◆ All neighborhoods need to accept the values of the *Healing Community* to ensure that all visitors coming to the community are treated with expertise and shared with compassion and love—which is the essence of relationship-centered care.
- ◆ In *Healing Community*, guidelines for relationship are promoted, remembered, and practiced: deep, respectful listening; non-judgmental, level-playing-field interaction; and invitational education.
- ◆ In *Healing Community*, each neighborhood is recognized and supported for its differences and its contributions to the whole.

Some Specifics

Some specific issues that can have significant effect on a hospital as a *Healing Community* are (but are not limited to) the following:

- ◆ Welcoming to the hospital needs to be done with great attention. Patients, families, friends, staff, management, board members, volunteers, community, and even regulators need to be welcomed with great attention.
- ◆ Being welcomed open-heartedly and in a very nourishing fashion goes a long way toward creating healing expectations, trust, and good relationships for a healing hospital experience.
- ◆ Being welcomed haphazardly or carelessly goes a long way toward eroding the subsequent hospital experience and creates difficulties for patients, families, friends, caregivers, and the institution as a whole.
- ◆ Great attention and mindfulness need to be given to welcoming in person, on the telephone, in advertising and marketing, at meetings, and during a hospital stay.
- ◆ After mindful, attentive welcoming, all resources of a hospital as *Healing Community* are available to the experience of the person entering the hospital to get service, to visit, to work, or to support the activities of the institution.
- ◆ The resources are offered mindfully: all members of the *Healing Community* work at being present, at being aware, at noticing, and at listening deeply.
- ◆ In a *Healing Community* there is a wholeness that allows each person involved to get what is needed from the community as a whole, with no one person being required to "do it all." The universal intention of the community for healing provides for the needs of all, by all.
- ◆ The intention to heal is the foundation of *Healing Community* and must be consciously held all the time. It is presented to staff during orientation and routinely encouraged during all meetings, all in-services, and even in marketing and reporting about the community. It is spoken about, written about, taught, and fostered in all activities of the community, even at board meetings. It is practiced, modeled, remembered, and promoted as the framework and guide for right action.
- ◆ To prevent healing intention from being overshadowed or submerged by fatigue, frustration, hurriedness, noise, and bottom-line thinking, coping skills for stress are taught and modeled on an ongoing basis.
- ◆ Staff in-service education is not just about medical facts but is constantly devoted to self-care, wellness, competency, and coping skills. Relationship skills are routinely fostered.
- ◆ Experience around wellness is provided on a routine basis with opportunities for activities such as meditation or breath work.
- ◆ Healing language rather than business language is promoted throughout the hospital and its activities. Healing language fosters healing intention. Business language represses healing intention and can repress healing behavior.
- ◆ The power of language and words is taught, and constant reminders are provided about the power of words to enhance and foster healing or to erode and inhibit healing.

(An excellent example is use of the word *discharge* rather than a word such as *transition*. The hospital "discharges" or "gets rid of" or "separates" a patient from the institution; this action/process is "done to" the patient. A patient "transitions" or moves along a path of healing from the hospital experience to the next part of his or her journey, whether at home or at a rehabilitation facility or wherever they need to be. "Discharge" has negative connotations; "transition" has more positive connotations.)

- ◆ Subsequent mindful attention needs to be present during patient transition out of the hospital and during follow-up encounters.

Results

- ◆ Mindful, hospital *Healing Community* experiences will result in patient satisfaction, improved outcomes, caregiver satisfaction with increased chance for a positive sense of meaning in work, and community satisfaction.
- ◆ Positive experiences for all members of a hospital *Healing Community* will create a more harmonious work environment, suited to allow healing for all participants, including the caregivers. The institution itself must benefit from such conditions in terms of both tone and business success. Caregiver recruitment and retention must benefit positively from such an environment.
- ◆ In a larger sense, a hospital as a *Healing Community* will be a useful model for hospitals in general. Medical care must move toward a more humane model of utilization of high technology and all other useful tools, with people and their interaction the center of focus.