

## COMMENTARY

# Keeping hospitals viable

by Stephen S. Mills

Many of us read the Oct. 25 cover story in New York Magazine, "Something is Killing Our Hospitals." And we nodded our heads in recognition as the paragraphs unfolded.

It is a stark depiction of the multiple (and often competing) forces at work that are changing the industry of patient care, and in some cases threatening the viability of the hospitals and healthcare systems that serve both as part of our region's lifeblood and as a public safety net. The article aptly describes the factors that coalesced in the closure of four hospitals in Queens in the past three years, plus that of St. Vincent's in Manhattan. All the rest face these risks. Right now. Even the best management team and white shoe restructuring consultants can't guarantee a turnaround if a precarious situation is allowed to go too far.

For New York Hospital Queens, remaining on the plus side of the balance sheet means continual investment in our three time-tested priorities: high quality care, patient satisfaction, and safety. And our fourth priority — managing each dollar — allows us to have a future even as reimbursement rates continue to be constricted in ways that can strangle a medical practice or full-service institution.

Fiscal scrutiny is not in conflict with our growth plans; it is the reality of trying to sustain a high-achieving healthcare institution in this time of upheaval and uncertainty. Here's where we invest our dollars:

### High-quality care

The people of Queens must be able to find the high-level medical services they need where they live, work and play. Today, there is no need to leave this borough for great medical results.

We offer the right medical talent, technology and results right here. From joint replacement to robotic surgery for gynecology to obesity surgery — we have a medical staff of more than 1,600 physicians, dentists and podiatrists. Many of these talented men and women maintain medical practices in the community, and some of them are full-time employees of NYHQ. We continue to invest in additional talent. For example in the last two months we have added a new pain management specialist, a robotics-trained prostate

cancer specialist, and an orthopedic trauma specialist.

### Patient satisfaction

We must focus on our patient's experience. We devote our time and resources to accommodate the needs of our diverse community, and to understand how those needs are heightened when an individual becomes a patient, or the loved one of a patient. We have an advantage in terms of "cultural competency," as many of our employees hail from this borough and represent the many cultures we serve. We work hard to give our patients the service they deserve. In turn, that engenders loyalty and word-of-mouth endorsement from one patient to the next. As the government program that will either penalize or make whole hospitals with satisfaction ratings takes hold, we fully intend to be in the plus column.

### Safety

Even as operating margins get slimmer, we invest in technology that increases safety and quality within our facility, for our patients and for our staff. This goes well beyond our progress in implementing electronic medical record capability. For example, last month in our recently opened West Building we unveiled 10 state-of-the-art operating rooms, mostly for same-day surgery. By performing more minimally invasive surgeries versus traditional open incisions, we can lessen a patient's time in the hospital, decrease the rate and risk of infection, decrease pain and improve on quality measures that save dollars and are better for patients.

This is not to say that this is easy, or that we hold a "magic bullet." We don't. The risk is palpable. For NYHQ, it is our focus on these three (and now four) priorities that will ensure we remain — and remain strong — as economic reforms and market forces deliver pushes and shoves to the industry that are difficult to predict or plan for, and certainly daunting to manage through.

*Stephen S. Mills is president and CEO of New York Hospital Queens.*



## Cool weather, healthy air

Cooler weather can mean more days spent indoors and signal the need to spruce up your home for seasonal get-togethers. When getting ready for the cozy days ahead, don't forget to clean your home's air duct system.

Air ducts and ventilation systems can become clogged with dust, pet hair and other contaminants, making them a breeding ground for mold and bacteria.

When firing up the furnace this winter, you may notice a burning smell coming from your air ducts. This is an indication of dust buildup in your home's ventilation system.



An easy way to tell if your system should be cleaned is to remove the vent with a screwdriver. If you see a collection of dust or mold, consider calling a professional heating and cooling system cleaning contractor.

Check that the company is a certified member of the National Air Duct Cleaners Association, an organization that tests the knowledge of contractors for safe and effective heating and cooling cleaning.

For more information and to find a certified air systems cleaning specialist near you, visit nadca.com.

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