



St. Joseph Hospital

Spiritual Connections for Staff and Patients

By Matt L. Ottinger

When thinking of hospitals, some may have visions of the chaos and bickering depicted on the many television shows and docudramas that permeate the airwaves. But the staff at St. Joseph Hospital in Kokomo contends it needn't be so chaotic for the patients or employees.

St. Joseph is one of St. Vincent's 17 ministries in Indiana, a collection that serves 45 counties. The hospital itself was founded by the Sisters of St. Joseph in Tipton in 1913 and has resided in different buildings. It now has over 800 employees throughout its various satellite sites in Howard County.

In the spirit

While many Indiana businesses strive to separate religion from their offices, the Catholic hospital welcomes spirituality as a calming contribution to the workplace.

"This is a place of spirituality where I can express and receive my spiritual needs," says supply handler Mark Leffer, whose wife also works at the hospital. "There's such a friendly atmosphere; it's family-oriented and I've built strong friendships. I'm proud to encourage my friends and family to work here."

Pictures and statues of Catholic symbolism can be found throughout the hospital's corridors, and a spiritual advisor is on staff for consultation. According to St. Joseph executives, it's the connection to spirituality that serves as a light toward illuminating best practices. Cindy Babb, executive director of human resources and organizational effectiveness, explains spirituality plays a role in the associate training program called Emotional, Social and Spiritual Intelligence, which is designed to create a better patient experience by enhancing the connection between staff and patients.

"We can be free in our expression of spirituality here and that's key," Babb notes. "There are prayers over the PA system every morning."

The spirit of joy (and fun) can also be found throughout the facility.

"When your work is serious, taking the time to laugh is really important," explains president and CEO Darcy Burthay. "Health care is a relationship business, and sometimes you need to lighten the mood."

She says this can be done with small gestures such as providing pizza during long shifts, delivering ice cream sandwiches to staff or rewarding workers with quirky prizes in friendly competitions between departments.

"Building trust between departments keeps people from working in silos," Burthay adds. "Everybody here is involved as a caretaker."

Soothing financial pains

Financially, St. Joseph works toward helping its associates by providing "socially just" living wages as well as flex spending to reduce insurance premiums. The hospital also prides itself on including staff in decision-making procedures. Babb explains the hospital has an associate council comprised of 17 hourly workers who meet once a month to learn about procedures, make suggestions and even voice complaints.

Burthay also states employees receive tuition reimbursement toward degrees and certificates. "In 2007, we had 40 associates pursuing degrees and 62 working toward certifications," she surmises, adding that children of associates can also receive educational assistance.

Sarah Shultz is a clinical informatics coordinator and staff nurse in the intensive care unit. She has benefited from the hospital's tuition assistance program and received her master's degree from the University of Southern Indiana, as well as a critical care certification. Shultz also notes that having staff involved in decision-making provides a morale boost.



Career Advancement

Sarah Shultz: "My co-workers are very supportive and this is very much a team atmosphere to help patients feel as healthy as they can. St. Joe's is very deserving (of being named to the Best Places list), and I couldn't imagine a better place to be."

Symbols of Christianity and Catholicism don the hospital's hallways, offering comfort through faith for patients and employees.

