

Straight Talk

A weekly update from management on the issues that matter most

January 20, 2011

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

We often hear the phrase “*high tech and high touch*” when describing the two essential attributes of a great healthcare system. But what do these attributes really mean? This past week, I saw both in action at NCH.

- **First, “high tech.”**

The *Heart Beat Suite* was created by RN Director **Claudia Garone** and a talented team of 17 directors, educators and operations managers, as a central monitoring station for patient electrical heart rhythms. Patients were previously monitored 24/7 at the nursing station on each individual floor, which was less efficient than having everyone on both campuses monitored in one central location. With the exception of the ICUs, we now monitor all downtown patients in the Heart Beat Suite. We will add North Naples later this spring.

I visited with the highly-trained monitor technicians. Their station on the first floor of the downtown campus, next to central registration, was specially designed to be comfortable, secure with easy communication to the nursing floors, so that any change in status can be quickly shared. The mood was upbeat, with all agreeing the new “*high tech*” space allowed technicians to cover for each other, be supportive, discuss changes in rhythms, and generally do a better job.

- **Now to “high touch.”**

While visiting a patient who was a personal friend and long-term NCH supporter, I had a revealing conversation about this patient with RN **Sandy Erlacher** in Gulf View Suites. Sandy explained that she and many of the nurses and techs in the unit, as well as some of the folks in the downtown ER, had gotten to know this gracious lady and her late husband, as both unfortunately became frequent users of our facilities. Sandy said this supportive lady would usually leave a kind note and some sweet treats after each hospital stay.

As commonly happens in our business, over time the professional relationship between a friendly patient and a caregiver—nurse, tech, physician—evolves from “*professional*” to very “*personal*.” Each becomes part of the other’s life. With time, as we all know, a wall breaks down—the wall that normally exists to separate and even protect professionals from becoming overly involved in the lives of those they care for. We caregivers see, experience, feel, and become part of an extended family. While we may deny it, the fact is that we, too, are emotionally involved and invested in our patients, who become our friends.

That’s why when I visited my friend, Sandy stopped me and confessed, “I’m using my waterproof make-up.” I was puzzled at first but then realized that Sandy contemplated a tearful day, because this patient, with whom she had become so close, was approaching the end of life. It doesn’t get more “*high touch*” than that. A few days later, while in line with NCH Board member Kay Gow and others, to share condolences with the family at the memorial service, I bumped into Sandy who was there reconnecting and trying to console the adult children.

The point is that to do our jobs right, we need both *high touch* and *high tech*. And we should always recognize that holding someone’s hand when they desperately need comfort is equally as important as monitoring their heart beat.

Respectfully,



Allen S. Weiss, M.D., President and CEO

P.S. Feel free to share *Straight Talk* by emailing me at allen.weiss@nchmd.org to be added; and join us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/nchflorida.