

February 5, 2009

Dear Friends and Colleagues:

This week, I want to talk about *communication*. Few subjects are more important at NCH.

Sharing information, keeping people informed, being transparent—all are critical for our continued success. I understand that, sometimes, people don't "like" what we have to say about current realities or changing economic conditions, but they still need to get the message.

So the real question is: "*How are we doing in communicating with you?*"

Communication was the focal point of two educational meetings I recently attended. The first was organized by the Association for Healthcare Philanthropy and the second was a Saturday afternoon lecture by Dr. John Lavine, Dean of the Medill School of Media at Northwestern. Both made the point that all of us are time-pressured and overwhelmed with information. That means that we all need to make choices as to how, when, and, most important, what information we wish to receive.

At NCH, for example, we have many different *targets* for communications, each with different needs. Internally, we have those with whom we work. Externally, we have our patients, their families, physicians, payers (insurance companies), the communities we serve, and the vendors who serve us. Each separate group has different concerns, which demand tailored messages. In every arena, communication must be two-way. Feedback is essential.

Studies show that the most effective form of communication is "*face-to-face*" – supervisor-to-subordinate or colleague-to-colleague. Speaking directly and seeking reaction is the best way to ensure meaningful feedback.

- For example, at lunch last week with guests from Moorings Park in the Brookdale Center for Healthy Aging (which had a 100% full census!), the husband of a 6 North nurse told me that Unit Director Trish Sutton, RN, used these *Straight Talks* as conversation starters at her team meetings. So Trish is using written communication to evoke face-to-face feedback. Outstanding!

The next best thing to face-to-face is email feedback, such as the note I got last week from ICU Microsystem Unit Director Jon Kling, RN.

- Jon told me about the "above-and-beyond" efforts of Dawn Warner, who personally drove a patient's family home to Marco Island (the opposite direction from where Dawn lives), after working a 12-hour shift. Jon urged me to publicly praise Dawn's efforts, writing, "*Thanks so much for putting these examples in Straight Talk for all to see; soon it will be an epidemic that we can't and will not stop.*"

And speaking of *Straight Talk*, we've been doing these weekly letters for close to two years now. We have thousands of individuals on the email distribution and are distributing a hard copy every two weeks with paychecks. What I need to know from you: Am I sharing the right messages? What topics are of most interest? What else should we be discussing in this forum?

Our intent with *Straight Talk* is to make it worthwhile and meaningful to you. In other words, we want you to read these letters. To do that, we need your feedback. So, "*How are we doing?*"

Respectfully,



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

P. S. Feel free to share *Straight Talk* and ask anyone to email me at allen.weiss@nchmd.org to be added.