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Healthcare

Prescription for Wellness

Six Questions for Alameda Hospital CEO Deborah Stebbins



Deborah Stebbins took over as chief executive officer at Alameda Hospital in November 2007, bringing with her almost 30 years of experience in the healthcare industry. In just more than a year, she has taken the

pulse of the Alameda community, reached out to the diverse population, strengthened existing services and recommended new programs to help Alamedans meet changing healthcare needs.

Why is it so important for Alameda to have a good community hospital?

Alameda is thought of as a small island location but has a population of 75,000. That's not a tiny community. Residents are very interested in maintaining a safety net in the event of a natural disaster, or proximity to emergency care on a day-to-day basis. I think a population of 75,000 needs a healthcare center, a hospital. Our goal really is to be the first responders for the community—the first place to look for information about care and basic services. We may not always be able to completely fulfill all healthcare needs, but we can educate people and play a role in directing them to other parts of the system. We are not too far from other large providers, but I still think it is very important that this community be able to look to a presence on the island. So we like to think of ourselves as an ongoing medical and primary healthcare resource.

Does Alameda Hospital offer specialized services to attract Alameda residents and people outside the immediate community?

Yes, to support the hospital's infrastructure, our basic medical services, we need to offer unique services to create a niche. I don't like the word niche, but specialty services not provided by every hospital do underpin the availability of basic services. Marketing used to be a dirty word 25 to 30 years ago, and I would never use the word marketing in a hospital setting with physicians. In those days, you never would refer to your community as your clients; it was always your patients. But now these words are a regular part of the healthcare business.

How do specialized services reflect the needs of Alameda residents?

I was surprised, before I took the job, to learn the percent of seniors in Alameda is not as large as I expected. But the only segment of Alameda that is going to grow over the next 10 to 15 years is the population over 65, and it will grow threefold. Other age groups will remain relatively stable. The other important thing to know about Alameda is that it is becoming increasingly diverse, with a lot of growth in the Asian population in particular. One of our efforts is an Asian outreach program headed by a person fluent in Cantonese and Mandarin, which are the two languages we encounter most often. There is a Filipino population in town and we have Filipino staff, so the Tagalog language is not a barrier for us. Alameda Hospital is seen by many longtime residents as a fixture in the traditional Alameda community. We need to be just as friendly and accessible to the new community we are serving now.

What other trends will affect the delivery of medical care in Alameda?

The projected national decline in primary care physicians. The average medical school graduate is \$140,000 in debt—debt that must be paid off over 10 to 15 years. Primary care, including general, internal and family medicine, unfortunately is one of the lower-paying areas of specialization. Added to that is the lifestyle. Historically a PCP had to be “on call” or have a system of back up. When I first started in this business, it was not unusual for PCPs to meet their patients in the ER. Fortunately, this style of practice is changing thanks to the concept of a “hospitalist.” At Alameda Hospital we have 24/7 coverage by a hospitalist—usually a physician who started in internal medicine but became very skilled at intensive care. Sometimes called critical care docs. The 24/7 cover by the hospitalist allows PCPs to stay in their offices, practicing more efficiently what they specialize in, outpatient care.

What does the future hold for Alameda Hospital clients?

We are looking at the needs of our senior population. Seniors need help accessing care at the right points in the system. They need to interact with a variety of providers in the community; sometimes they need transportation support. We just took over operation of the South Shore Convalescent Hospital. We are looking at collaboration with Cardinal Point. We have a physician who would like to establish a clinic over there improving access to physician care. And ongoing education is a top priority—diabetic care, nutrition, exercise—information vital to maintaining not only good health but also good function.

We have been recognized by the American Stroke Association for excellence. We are developing a stroke care management program and started the accreditation application process. So one education topic we are looking at is stroke awareness: warning signs of a stroke. And fast stroke response makes a difference in terms of not only life and death but also life with a lot of disabilities.

We also got very high marks in an Alameda County survey on pediatric ER care. We spend a lot of time educating our physicians and nurses, having the right equipment, and

having dosing of medications down to pediatric levels. We don't really use the term "ouchless" ER, but a lot of pediatric emergency treatment is how you approach it—not scaring the child, and keeping it as pain free as you can.

Another area is orthopedics. This is a service with a lot of dimensions to it. It is where cardiac care was 15 to 20 years ago, and it is applicable to youth and seniors. You are going to see a lot more joint replacements, hip replacements, knees, etc. You can see that as early as people in their 50s. Then you've got sports injuries, that affect younger people. There has been a lot of technological advance in minimally invasive procedures. It's like when open-heart surgery was a big deal; now open-heart surgery is done with minimally invasive techniques. It's the same thing with orthopedics.

Any final thoughts?

Alameda is a community with many positive things going for it—location, weather, good recreation, good schools. Access to healthcare, to a hospital, not just when you are sick, but as a source of education and wellness, is a very important part of the quality of life in Alameda.

—By Noelle Robbins

Services

Alameda Hospital offers a broad range of community health education classes and services including gentle yoga, Tai Chi, strength and balance training, nutrition facts and a prostate cancer support group. In addition, the hospital provides CPR classes, diabetes programs, blood pressure screenings, and health fairs. For more information, visit www.alamedahospital.org or contact Louise Nakada at (510) 814-4362.